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***The evolving nature of town centre
management internationally and my
advocacy for a strategic global-local
approach to practice and research in this
profession***

*A project submitted to Middlesex University for the degree of
Doctor of Professional Studies by Public Works*

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June, 2012

To Babi, my wife Kasia and our baby daughter Anusia

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I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Kate Maguire, who has been an inspirational role model of professionalism through her solid academic leadership, therapeutic pastoral guidance and unwavering belief in my ability at a time full of uncertainty at many levels for both of us.

My wife Kasia and, more recently, our new born baby daughter Anusia endured stoically long weekends and evenings of reflection and writing on my part. More importantly, their determination, belief and loving warmth kept me focused on this doctoral submission at a time when the tribulations of pregnancy and childbirth for first-time parents like us should have taken priority.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering support and their belief that, eventually, I would (maybe) get that (long overdue) doctorate.

Table of contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Biography of J. Andres Coca-Stefaniak	9
2.1	Ontological considerations	9
2.2	Epistemological and positioning considerations	15
3.	Public works	20
	Introduction	20
3.1	Public work 1 – The Persefones project (2002-2004)	23
3.2	Public work 2 – European typology of town centre management partnerships (2005-2007)	34
3.3	Public work 3 – Development and delivery of qualifications for town centre managers (2006-2010)	41
3.4	Public work 4 – The Journal of Town and City Management (2008- present)	55
4.	Reflections	69
5.	New directions	75
6.	References	78
7.	Appendix – Supporting evidence	97

1. INTRODUCTION

Our great mistake is to try to exact from each person virtues which he does not possess, and to neglect the cultivation of those which he has.

- Marguerite Yourcenar in "Memoirs of Hadrian"

My submission for the Doctorate in Professional Studies by Public Works is embodied in this contextual statement. The public works I critique as part of this submission, which include a mix of published journal papers, a leading professional journal I am editor-in-chief of and several European projects can be found in the Appendix and my personal website (<http://arts.academia.edu/AndresCocaStefaniak>). This contextual statement is presented in five sections. In this section, I contextualise my submission by defining what I understand by town centre management and outline four areas where I believe I have made an original contribution to knowledge and practice. In section two I briefly explain some of the ontological (e.g. my career), epistemological and positioning (e.g. my relationships with and impact on town centre management as a practitioner as well as an academic) aspects that have influenced my submission and stance on this topic. In section three I critique four key areas of my public works within the context of research and practice in town centre management and the evolving partnerships that help to implement this concept in town centres. Finally, in sections four and five I reflect on my submission and discuss the theoretical and practical outcomes of my work, from a personal and professional perspective with a set of conclusions that give specific pointers in terms of the development of town centre management practice and research in the future.

I see my contribution to knowledge and professional practice as four-pronged. I have set up the first ever transnational European town and city twinning network for

town centre managers with over twenty six towns and cities across Spain and the UK, developed an original international typology of town centre management partnerships based on research work carried out with leading practitioners and academics in town centre management from eight European countries, developed two pioneering postgraduate courses (an MSc and an MA) in this field in the UK, and created a leading global professional journal on the management of towns and cities with editorial board members from eighteen different nationalities spread across five continents – the Journal of Town and City Management. These activities draw together my research, teaching, consultancy activities and interest in developing a community of practice that facilitates knowledge transfer internationally between practitioners and academics in town centre management.

Town centre management

Town centre management (TCM) as a concept has existed in the UK for nearly thirty years. The evolution of this concept has largely responded to the changing needs of urban revitalisation (Page and Hardyman, 1996) with a multidisciplinary array of contributions from academics and practitioners from disciplines such as place marketing (Stubbs et al., 2002; Warnaby et al., 2005), sustainable development (Banister, 1998), community engagement (Woolley, 2000; Guy and Duckett, 2003), place making and regeneration (Otsuka and Reeve, 2007) and public-private partnerships (Jones et al., 2003; Lloyd et al., 2003; de Nisco et al., 2008).

In its origins, which I have tried to synthesise visually in Figure 1, TCM was perceived primarily as a response to external factors through a “a comprehensive response to competitive pressures, which involves development, management and promotion of both public and private areas within town centres, for the benefit of all concerned” (Wells, 1991, p. 24).

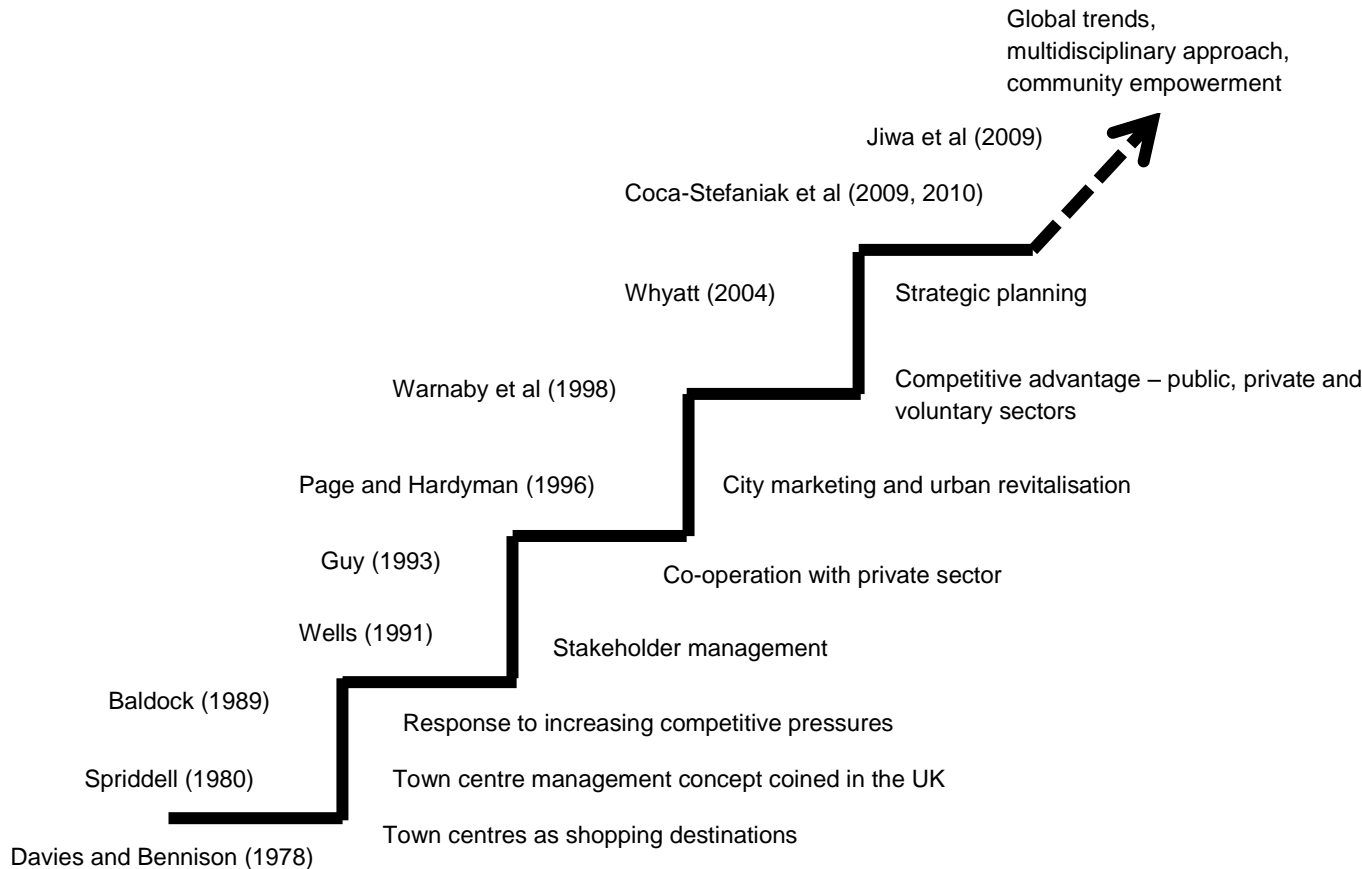


Figure 1. Conceptual evolution of town centre management in the UK

From its outset, the concept was almost monopolised by British authors (e.g. Baldock, 1989; Guy, 1993), though evidence suggests that TCM *per se* was coined as a British concept from its inception in practice (Spriddell, 1980). In spite of this, practice-based research across Europe appears to coincide with British TCM models in its emergence as a problem-focused solution to the advent of competition to town centre based retail outlets, often in the form of out-of-town shopping centres and retail parks in the 1980 and 1990s (Dawson and Burton, 1999).

As the potential of TCM became apparent, particularly through partnership working as a catalyser to bring together key stakeholders from the public (e.g. local authorities) and private (e.g. local businesses) sectors, more strategic interpretations of this concept began to emerge in the UK:

“the search for competitive advantage through the maintenance and/or strategic development of both public and private areas and interests within town centres, initiated and undertaken by stakeholders drawn from a combination of the public, private and voluntary sectors”

(Warnaby et al, 1998; pp. 17-18)

In the UK, the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) was created in 1991 and soon developed into the leading body representing town centre management schemes across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland with 700 members in 2011. The ATCM defined town/city centre management in 2011 as:

“a co-ordinated pro-active initiative designed to ensure that our town and city centres are desirable and attractive places. In nearly all instances the initiative is a partnership between the public and private sectors and brings together a wide-range of key interests”

(ATCM, nd)

However, TCM is not a purely British concept. Parallel initiatives developed in the 1990s in European countries including Spain (AGECU, nd; Martín Rojas, 1997; Dirección General de Comercio Interior, 1998; Sánchez del Río, 2001), Italy (Moras et al., 2004; Codato et al., 2005), Sweden (Sandahl and Lindh, 1995; Svenska Stadskärnor, nd), Austria (Stadtmarketing Austria, nd), Norway (Norsk Sentrumsforum, nd), Belgium (AMCV, nd), and Germany (BCSD, nd). The means to achieve this were altogether different. Yet, in the case of Southern European countries, there was a very early realisation that, if the main strategic focus was to reclaim town centre retail, small and medium-sized independent retail associations should be empowered to lead the TCM concept to suit the needs of their localities (Molinillo Jiménez, 2001) often in close association with local residents who, after all, constituted their main customer base (Frechoso Remiro, 2000; Torres Outón, 2005). Thus, the concept of *centros comerciales urbanos* or *centros comerciales abiertos* emerged (Castresana, 1999), etymologically rooted in the concept of shopping centres (*centros comerciales* in Spanish) but with special reference to their historical backdrop (*agora* or market in Ancient Greece) whereby they were often open (*abiertos* in Spanish) to the elements and located in urban enclaves (*urbanos*). This Spanish retail-led version of town centre management has been

defined by Vilariño et al. (2002; p. 35) as “[schemes that focus on managing] retail outlets in a section of the town or city, normally bound by a number of streets, which tends to coincide with the historical old town where, traditionally, street markets existed and, therefore, most trade used to take place outdoors” (translated from the Spanish by the author of this literature review).

Parallel to their Spanish counterparts, similar models of retail-led town centre management schemes emerged in Italy in the form of *centri commerciale naturale* (Codato, 2010), where the word *naturale* (“natural” in English) attempts to reclaim the traditional setting where retail would be based (town centres) and which continues to exist in much of Italy in spite of growing competition from edge-of-town and out-of-town shopping malls.

At the same time as these early developments took place in Spain and Italy, other models of town centre management emerged across Europe in Scandinavia (Forsberg et al., 1999), Austria and Germany (Wiezorek, 2011), and France. In the latter, the British town centre management concept of local authority-led partnership management schemes merged with the retail-led model of Spain and Italy to create more of a hybrid, where both public and private sectors had a (nearly) equal weight in the decision making (Cossardeaux, 1999).

Although most academics and practitioners would concur that partnerships with representatives from key local stakeholders (incl. residents, businesses, the local authority, etc) are key to the development of town centre management schemes that best serve the interests of their localities, there is a growing school of thought that critiques the ethos and ultimate strategic aims of these public-private partnerships (e.g. Reeve, 2004; Blackwell, 2011) as they appear to be increasingly dominated by commercial interests and lacking in democratic accountability across the full spectrum of local stakeholders, particularly when private funding prevails, such as tends to be the case for Business Improvement Districts in the UK (Berry et al, 2011) and North America (Grossman, 2011). Some of the implications of these issues on the governance of town centre management partnerships have also been studied by Italian authors (e.g. Zanderighi, 2004; Gianoli, 2011). It is largely as a result of this that the conceptual past, present and future of town centre management cannot be divorced from the evolving ethos, values, modus operandi,

strategic focus, funding and structure of the partnerships that deliver this on the ground.

My own work and the focus of this statement reflect this changing paradigm and strong link between the development of town centre management as a concept and the evolving partnerships that deliver it. The typology of town centre management partnerships that I originally developed with colleagues in 2007 and finally published in 2009 (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2009), has been tested and refined through European transnational projects and case studies co-authored with practising town centre managers in a number of countries (Quilliot and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Ahlqvist and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Rinaldi and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Fitzgerald and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Panadero et al, 2006; Russel et al, 2007; Lobendanz et al, 2007) and continues to grow today. In fact, this typology has been recognised by the sector and even cited by UK Government publications (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008; p. 27). I will expand on this and critique it further on in this contextual statement.

More recently, I have turned my attention to understanding some of the challenges affecting town centres and town centre management partnerships in the UK and overseas, which include the need to provide longer-term sustainability to large regeneration and urban revitalisation programmes (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2008; Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2009; Tay and Coca-Stefaniak, 2010), the growth of the evening economy as opposed to the more established daytime economy (Jiwa et al, 2009), the present and future skills challenges to town centre and place managers (Coca-Stefaniak, 2009; Coca-Stefaniak, 2010a), rising unemployment (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2011), the use of culture as a catalyser for change in town centres and local communities (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2010) and the multidisciplinary nature of wider city management (Coca-Stefaniak, 2010b; Coca-Stefaniak, 2011) as founder and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Town and City Management.

My journey over the last nine years has involved a constant process of self-discovery as I made the transition from mining and oil well drilling engineering to a practitioner in town centre management via several years of teaching and research in academia. In this process, I created Europe's first town and city twinning programme for town centre managers and small independent retailers (Coca-Stefaniak and Oldfield, 2005); planned, organised, executed and analysed the

largest European transnational survey of small retailers based in recognised town centre management schemes (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2005a); created, validated and delivered an Introductory Diploma in Place Management, an MSc in Place Management and an MA in Place Regeneration and Marketing (IPM, 2007); led a number of European projects researching different aspects of town centre management and place management (Retail Enterprise Network 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006), and culminated in my current position as International Manager for the Association of Town Centre Management, Fellow of the Institute of Place Management and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Town and City Management, all of which have allowed me to position myself as a leader in the community of practice of town centre management in the UK and overseas. In addition to formal publications linked to this work, as outlined above, I was also fortunate to participate as keynote speaker at a number of academic and practitioner town centre management conferences, including Contemporary Issues in Retail and Marketing (CIRM) and the World Congress on Downtowns and Town Centres, among others (Coca-Stefaniak and Parker, 2004; Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2006; Coca-Stefaniak and Radominski, 2008; Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2010), in addition to visiting lecturer appointments at the University of Valencia and, more recently, the University of East London, where my initial visiting post is due to be formalised from April 2012 through a part-time appointment as Senior Research Fellow.

In summary, my contribution to knowledge and professional practice has included the development of a typology of town centre management partnerships for use at a pan-European level grounded in publications from five European countries; the design and execution of practice-based research projects co-funded by the European Union with the aim of investigating the role of town centre management schemes in the UK and overseas; the design, validation and delivery of a number of pioneering university postgraduate courses for town centre and place managers; developing practice-based case studies of successful European town centre management schemes with practising town centre managers in six European countries; helping to build a pan-European community of practice in town centre management (Institute of Place Management) and leading this community of practice and research through my work as International Manager of the Association of Town Centre Management and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Town and City Management.

My key motivation on this front has been my passion for helping people create and manage places that develop into the best locations they can be for all those involved in their success. Similarly, the country-specific focus of most research published internationally and practice has been a key motivator for me to explore town centre management in terms of what each country can learn from practice and research elsewhere. All in all, given my multidisciplinary background professionally as well as academically, which would not fit a traditional PhD programme comfortably, I am grateful to be able to build on my interest and experience of evolving town centre management schemes internationally through this Doctoral programme by Public Works.

2. BIOGRAPHY OF J. ANDRES COCA-STEFANIAK

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. (...) have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

- Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple Inc., in 2005 graduation speech to Stanford University students after being diagnosed with cancer

2.1 Ontological considerations

In this section, I outline reflectively key events in my life and the influence they had on my thinking about towns and cities using a self-ethnographic approach. My professional path towards town centre management has been a rather winding one through a variety of professional disciplines but all the richer for it as it has allowed me to explore the challenges affecting our towns and cities from a number of different - and sometimes even opposing - perspectives. This section explores these influences through a process of critical reflection and offers insights into the processes that have shaped my thinking about town centre management today as well as the role of partnerships in its delivery.

After completing my primary and secondary schooling in Oviedo (north-western Spain), I studied the UK equivalent of (then) A-levels in the United States, where I obtained a High School Diploma with Honours in 1988. My decision to complete this pre-university stage in the US was prompted by a growing interest in new cultures (I grew up as a bilingual child in a Spanish-Polish household and crossed the Iron Curtain several times to visit my grandparents in Poland) and experiencing the life of a teenager in North America, where public transport at the time was virtually non-existent and *downtowns* were already suffering the pulling power of large out-of-

town shopping malls, with small retailers playing a much more limited role in the vitality and diversity of town centres than what I was accustomed to in my native Spain. Having excelled at school in humanities subjects such as politics, history, philosophy and religion, I decided instead to follow my parents' scientific inclination by enrolling - possibly much to their dismay - in a Bachelor degree in Mining Engineering at the University of Nottingham (UK) in 1989. My childhood in Spain's main coal mining region and passion for the earth sciences and anything that meant crawling into underground holes had a lot to do with this. More fundamentally, my main motivation was being able to make a difference as a professional, in this case to the safety and lives of northern Spanish mining communities blighted by regular mine accidents and over 35 fatalities every year in the 1980s.

Little did I know then that, several years later, I would not only live in a mining community in the North of England but work down the pit too. Four years later, I had achieved a first-class degree in Mining Engineering (Nottingham) and an MSc in Engineering Rock Mechanics (Imperial College) with a bursary from Rio Tinto Ltd. Student life in the UK was a great opportunity to learn about a very different model (campus-based residence) to what I had known from Spain but also offered me wonderful and at times rather sad insights into the changing landscape of mining communities in the face of pit closures and town centres with evening economy challenges very different to what I had known in the more café-focused culture of Southern Europe.

As the Channel Tunnel linking the UK to mainland Europe neared its completion during my Master degree in Engineering Rock Mechanics at Imperial College and other unprecedented civil engineering projects entered the final stages of their feasibility evaluation (e.g. Yucca Mountain high level nuclear waste repository in Nevada, USA), I began to discover the possibilities of a new concept of urbanism too: underground cities. At the Underground Space Centre (University of Minnesota, USA), my research focus and philosophy towards underground construction began to change. The mining focus of working (largely) against nature with temporary excavations designed to make a profit and stay open only as long as access to a resource was necessary, began to be supplanted by the possibility of innovative designs that would last for over a 100 years (e.g. an underground shopping centre with public gardens at surface level) or even an unprecedented 10,000 years as in the case of high level nuclear waste repositories. At the Underground Space Centre,

I learnt about engineering but also about the design (architectural) and psychological aspects of underground living at a time when many cities around the world, but particularly in Japan, India and China, began to realise that rising land (surface) prices in city centres meant that the future for many buildings was underground. Other parts of the world like Scandinavia, Alaska and the US state of Minnesota itself were already experimenting then with the energy-saving underground or earth-sheltered designs that are familiar to us today even in residential housing. Other projected uses for this technology included mineral production in outer space (e.g. Mars) and the potential establishment of permanent human settlements on other planets.

It was possibly as a result of this process of learning about the psychological and physiological effects of underground design on people that my transition from a positivist research philosophy began towards a more pragmatist or even phenomenological approach. Up to this point, my scientific-based thinking in engineering seldom ventured beyond purely ergonomic issues which could be incorporated into the design of machines using clear parameters that sometimes lent themselves to optimisation techniques. Yet, progressively, it became evident to me that perceptions among occasional users of underground spaces (e.g. shoppers in underground shopping centres) could be best evaluated using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g. mixed methods) where psychology could indeed represent methodologically the bonding agent between the more quantitative (and largely positivist) engineering aspects of the research and the more qualitative (and more phenomenological) creative architectural design elements.

At the Underground Space Centre I discovered the true multidisciplinary nature of civil engineering projects, particularly in relatively unexplored areas at the time such as underground buildings. These design concepts also sparked an interest in sustainable development that continues to influence my thinking about urban spaces and earth resources today (Coca-Stefaniak, *forthcoming*). My contribution to this field in the form of a Masters thesis at Imperial College was in the form of an alternative approach to engineering design: the use of artificial intelligence (neural networks) to analyse complex rock behaviour where the degree of heterogeneity of rock structures rendered classical numerical models virtually redundant (Coca-Stefaniak, 1993). Although unpublished, this work was cited by Milar and Clarici

(1994) in a paper that would itself become cited by eleven subsequent published works on this topic. My research at the University of Minnesota was to follow this path but focusing on underground buildings instead. Unfortunately, the Japan banking crisis of 1995 brought an abrupt end to my doctorate's funding as well as the entire Underground Space Centre at the University of Minnesota, which folded later that year.

Following on from this premature end to my doctorate, I started work for Shell International Ltd in 1996 as an Offshore Drilling Engineer in The Netherlands and then the Northern North Sea, based in Aberdeen (Scotland). Although my primary role was that of implementing drilling plans and supervising drilling of oil and gas wells, the environment was a fascinating one: oil platforms resembling entire cities and with capacity for up to 200 people in the middle of the Northern North Sea UK sector with some of the most extreme conditions known to man. It was here that I was first able to witness and reflect upon the effects on people of our society's seemingly insatiable need for energy and the twenty four-seven approach to work. In spite of the uplifting Glaswegian humour that permeates my memories of this period, I have never come across since a higher population density in terms of people separated or divorced. Similarly, although I was based in Aberdeen during my rest periods away from the rigs, it was in this quintessential oil town that I discovered a role for town centres as areas of transition, somewhat similar to the concept of third spaces/places (Soja, 1996), as most offshore oil workers did not live in Aberdeen but merely used the city as a launching pad on their way out or a *mega watering hole* on their way back after up to three weeks of alcohol deprivation on the oil rigs.

Although working for Shell in a truly international environment and with high levels of early responsibility was a wonderful experience, I longed for a less specialised job with wider management responsibilities at work and a more embedded role in the local community. A job as mining engineer in a deep mine in North Yorkshire offered me exactly that, as well as the chance to pursue transferable management qualifications supported by my employer. Five years of living in a northern market town with over two hundred years of mining heritage allowed me to explore aspects of place identity, community pride in mining communities and sense of belonging that had been difficult for me to understand up to this point given that I had resided primarily in cities with populations in excess of 150,000. Professionally, in addition

to working my way from miner to supervisor and shift manager responsible for the lives of thirty five men at Boulby Mine (Cleveland Potash Ltd), I reached a major public works milestone in my life during this period: my first publication in an international academic-practitioner journal (Coca-Stefaniak and Pettit, 1999). Although this publication was a practitioner one and largely focused on engineering projects under development at the time at Boulby Mine, it remains my first publication ever in English and a major personal stepping stone towards disseminating my work publicly to wider national and international audiences in an environment at the time where I faced reluctance and even opposition from some of my colleagues, who were eager to keep project information confidential and within company boundaries.

Difficult times at Boulby Mine with low market prices for salt and potash exacerbated by a weak dollar in 2001-2002, which affected company exports, meant that, once again, I faced the potential prospect of unemployment. As I neared the completion of a distance-learning Postgraduate Diploma in Management at the University of York following 3 years of study (it all started with a TROCN vocational management qualification sponsored by my employer), an opportunity arose for me to get back to academia as project manager of an EU-funded transnational project investigating the role of small and medium-sized retailers in the vitality and diversity of town centres in the UK and Spain. As I started my new project management job at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, my personal interest in town centres began to take a new impetus as this field began to progressively become core to my job rather than just an interest to pursue in my spare time through observation, conversation with peers and anecdotal reading. It was in this new job as Transnational Manager on the EU-funded Persephones project (Retail Enterprise Network, 2002) that I finally got the opportunity to learn about town centre management and its intrinsic relationship with retail in the UK and overseas, start setting up communities of practice in this field (e.g. first transnational town twinning programme ever for retailers and town centre managers, see Coca-Stefaniak and Oldfield, 2005) and explore new practice-based models from continental Europe.

I started to publish in this field too but, somewhat unusually in those days and still today for academics, generally with practitioners as co-authors. This approach, rooted in my personal belief that academia and professional practice should develop and grow hand in hand, was influenced significantly by my background as an

applied scientist (mining engineering) where such cooperation between academics (often former practitioners themselves) would often work with consultants and industry clients on problem-focused projects that would receive similar treatment when published in journals. This contrasted with the view at the time in many schools of management and business in the UK, where single-author publications with significant theoretical input were often perceived as better in quality and academic standing. Fortunately, my university administrator (transnational projects manager) status at the time allowed me to temporarily avoid these debates as journal publications were not part of my performance criteria at work. Similarly, I believed that the best way to influence a community of practice would be to work within it with an ethnographic approach and publish collaboratively with key members of this community rather than maintain the traditional distant (positivist) stance of some of my colleagues in academia at the time.

My work as Transnational Manager on EU-funded projects (e.g. Persephones, Agora, TOCEMA) at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School (MMUBS) between 2002 and 2006 allowed me to forge increasingly closer links with the Association of Town Centre Management (Europe's largest membership-based organisation of town centre managers with over 550 members) and many of its counterparts in continental Europe, such as Svenska Stadskarnor in Sweden, AMCV in Belgium and France, AGECEU in Spain and many others. As I did this and I began to present at international conferences as invited key speaker (Coca-Stefaniak and Parker, 2004), and I started making connections between existing models of town centre management across Europe. These would culminate in a journal paper published in 2009 that forms part of my public works submission (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2009). My publications and work with key European informants in town centre management over this period culminated with my appointment as Senior Lecturer in Place Management at MMUBS with responsibilities for the development, validation and delivery of two programmes that are still in existence today – the Introductory Diploma in Place Management and the MSc in Place Management (IPM, 2007). These two programmes, unique in the UK at the time in terms of their focus and target market (mainly town centre managers), signified not only my 'baptism of fire' in terms of lecturing and academic programme validation and management but, more importantly provided me with a crucial platform for debate within this community of practice. The confidential nature of our workshops meant that, unlike in other public events such as ATCM's Summer

School or Annual Conference, town centre managers could share insights into their profession without the concern of seeing their views misinterpreted by others. The implications of these fora as well as the resulting relationship between my public works and professional practice in town centre management are explored in more detail in the next section of this chapter – epistemological and positioning considerations.

2.2 Epistemological and positioning considerations

In this section, I reflect on my ontological evolution from a mere observer of town centres at first to a researcher, academic and practitioner afterwards. This process of critical self-reflection is aimed at eliciting the epistemological implications of this personal evolution as a professional. I also explore critically my current positioning towards the field of town centre management with reference to this epistemological backdrop.

A fundamental shift in my career in terms of research philosophy was my first year of work as transnational manager of the Persephones Project (part of the Retail Enterprise Network at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School). At that time, the largely qualitative (primarily phenomenology, constructivism and interpretivism) European research tradition in retail and town centre management was beginning to be challenged by quantitative North American researchers and practitioners with a more positivist paradigm who argued that the effectiveness of town centre management should be measured numerically and preferably using key performance indicators. Some of my project colleagues, with wider research experience in town centre management than I, subscribed to this view and actively pursued it (Pal and Sanders, 1997; Hogg et al, 2001; Hogg et al, 2004). Although as a qualified engineer I found this paradigm much more aligned with my research background at the time, my experience of work with offshore drilling crews with Shell International first and underground mining crews at Cleveland Potash Ltd afterwards, made me reluctant to align myself with this positivist paradigm.

As my work with town centre managers in the UK and Spain continued and I started co-authoring case studies with practising town centre managers, I began to realise

that the idiosyncrasies of cities, towns and places in general were too heterogeneous to be reduced to mere quantitative indicator benchmarking studies such as number of car parking spaces in a town centre or number of people walking down the high street every day. As my influence on the community of practice – both academic and practitioner grew –, I began to realise that my original despondent stand towards my academic colleagues' dominant research paradigm and much of the UK practitioner thinking at the time was right. My interpretivist research philosophy enabled me to present alternative models of town centre management from continental Europe in a different light. They could not be benchmarked or even compared to UK models as they followed fundamentally different values and paradigms, but their effectiveness at engaging local communities did not go unnoticed in the UK.

My first published paper on this topic (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2005b) showcased a value-driven town centre management scheme in Granollers (Spain) and represented the first Spanish case study of a working town centre management scheme ever published in an international journal. As a result of this, a fruitful relationship developed with practising town centre management colleagues in Granollers, which culminated in them being invited to present at an international conference organised by my project team at Manchester Metropolitan University, a study trip of twenty British town centre managers and retailers to Granollers in 2006, and appearance I made on TV3 in Catalonia (with over 2 million viewers) talking about European practice in town centre management and a personal interview with me published locally in Granollers in their book "El nou senyor esteve – la revolta tranquil·la del comerç ciutadà" (Relats i Cases, 2006; pp. 102-104). For me, this was my first ever TV interview and the first time I had appeared in a book written for the wider public with the objective of disseminating the concept of value-based town centre management. The challenge of explaining this concept to a non-specialist audience was compounded by the fact that it had to be done in Spanish. In spite of the fact that this language was my mother tongue, my only experience of dealing with town centre management until that point was with specialist English-speaking audiences of students, practitioners and academics.

It was perhaps this challenge of explaining town centre management in Spanish to the general public that gave me the confidence to do the same later on local radio in Pontevedra (north-western Spain) and Łódź (central Poland) in Polish. Parallel to

this, as my involvement with further European projects funded by the INTERREG IIIC programme increased (TOCEMA project, 2005), I found myself invited increasingly more often to deliver keynote talks at town centre management practitioner conferences in Spain (Mercurio, 2005), Poland (Coca-Stefaniak and Radominski, 2007), Sweden (Jansson, 2007), and the UK (CIRM, 2006) in my drive to contribute towards the creation of Europe's first pan-European association of national town centre management associations, which became known as TOCEMA (Town Centre Management Europe; TOCEMA, nd), with over 1,000 European towns and cities represented under this umbrella organisation.

In addition to the work outlined above, I worked with colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University to set up the Journal of Place Management and Development, where I have been on the editorial board from its launch in 2008, and the Institute of Place Management, where I remain a Fellow and one of the founder speakers in the Institute's online promotional video (IPM, nd). Since then, I have also been instrumental in setting up similar international communities of practice for academics and practitioners in city management and city marketing, including the European Place Marketing Institute (Best Place, nd) and the Journal of Town and City Management as founder and editor-in-chief (Henry Stewart Publications, nd). Following the development and validation of two pioneering courses in place management at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School (MSc Place Management and Introductory Diploma in Place Management), I have taught over 45 practising town centre managers and regeneration officers on these courses as senior lecturer and course director. Furthermore, I designed and validated the MA Place Regeneration and Marketing at University of the Arts London in 2008 and managed to attract over 20 applicants from the UK, Poland and Italy in its first edition until, two months before the start of the programme, senior university management decided to axe the programme along with fifteen other Masters programmes at London College of Communication. It was soon afterwards, in 2010, that I continued my involvement in this field more as a practitioner as international manager for the Association of Town Centre Management, where I deputise for the organisation's chief executive on all matters international. Although this shift back to practice was not entirely intended and was more the result of wide-spread staff redundancies at the University of the Arts London, I have now travelled full circle from starting in the field of town centre management as a transnational manager of European projects at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2002, via a successful

academic career that combined teaching, funding and research leadership responsibilities.

In spite of the fact that the career events outlined above may appear somewhat traumatic to some, they have brought about a very enriching transformational process for me which has progressively helped me to build the confidence I needed to secure a level of personal and professional positioning with regards to this discipline that very few have attained since. My teaching experience and studying on the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education have equipped me with the ability to assess both the robustness and applicability of research methodologies as well as retaining an intensely practical approach to the development (and sharing) of knowledge in the form of practice-based research. In many ways, these two abilities have merged into my role as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Town and City Management. Nevertheless, unlike many (though not all) of my colleagues in practice and academia, I remain a nonconformist in my positioning towards town centre management. One of my continuing areas of exploration, which I am currently achieving through a combination of university teaching, EU-funded projects and the management of my Journal, is the search for the interdependencies that appears to exist between different factors affecting urban locations and, consequently, their management.

Similarly, sustainability in its broadest sense – which was an early research interest of mine back in the days when I worked in the extractive industries – remains an area of fascination and intellectual curiosity for me in its application to all places urban, particularly if it can be explained in terms of the complex interactions that exist between the myriad of factors that define contested debates with regards to issues including community identity, management ethics, place branding, sustainable regeneration, social exclusion in urban settings, the commodification of high streets, and many more.

This DProf programme by Public Works gives me the chance to analyse through a process of critical self-reflection my thinking and concerns and to critique many of these issues as applied to town centre management using my work to date as the keystone for this critique. Similarly, it will give me the invaluable opportunity to ponder on future avenues for practice and research in town centre management to enable this concept to reinvent itself in the new millennium with a renewed vigour

and confidence currently under considerable threat from local authority budget cuts and major concerns about an impending double-dip recession likely to affect much of the European Union, including Britain.

3. PUBLIC WORKS

A writer - and, I believe, generally all persons - must think that whatever happens to him or her is a resource. All things have been given to us for a purpose, and an artist must feel this more intensely. All that happens to us, including our humiliations, our misfortunes, our embarrassments, all is given to us as raw material, as clay, so that we may shape our art.

- Jorge Luis Borges in "Twenty Conversations with Borges, Including a Selection of Poems" Interviews by Roberto Alifano (1984)

Introduction

If I were to choose key words or terms to sum up some of my learning edges they would include continuous compromise, multidisciplinary, mind sets, transferable skills, inclusion, participatory, nonconformist, sustainability, value driven agendas and knowledge exchange challenges.

Despite a thirty year tradition of research and practice in town centre management (Figure 1), research and practice-based evidence over the last ten years suggests that a number of knowledge gaps have existed at different chronological stages during this period, which my career in this field has aimed to address. Some of the key knowledge gaps in this respect included the following:

1. Town centre management and small independent retailers. By 2002, the role of small independently-owned retailers in the vitality, diversity and viability of town centres had not been explored comparatively (e.g. transnationally) with reference to existing town centre management schemes prior to 2003. Therefore, although a growing body of knowledge existed on the challenges faced by small retailers in the UK (Kirby, 1987; Clarke, 2000; Colins et al, 2000; Megicks, 2001; Smith and Sparks, 2000; Baron et al, 2001) and Spain

(Jones, 1994; Frassetto et al, 2002; Santos-Requejo and Gonzalez-Benito, 2000), this research had not been carried out with reference to the retailers' influence on an area's ability to prosper and the influence of networks (e.g. customers, other retailers) on the retailer's ability to survive and compete as a small business enterprise.

2. Town centre management in the European Union. Although published work has followed the development and challenges of UK-based town centre management schemes over the years, in 2004 it was still evident that, aside from a handful of exceptions [Forsberg et al, 1999; Molinillo-Jimenez, 2001], no publications existed on the development of town centre management schemes in continental Europe. Similarly, no attempt had been made in the literature to design a pan-European typology of town centre management schemes where the role and influence of small independent retailers could be mapped.
3. Professional and academic qualifications for town centre managers. In 2006, no formal qualifications existed in the UK for town centre managers aside from practitioner courses (with no qualification attached) delivered by the Association of Town Centre Management and other training service providers. More importantly, no coordinated attempt had been made to date to achieve professional recognition for this field of practice.
4. A practice-based journal in town and city management with academic and practitioner input. In 2008, although several academic and practitioner journals existed in a number of fields such as regeneration (e.g. Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal), urbanism and urban management (e.g. Cities) and place branding (e.g. Journal of Place Branding and Public Policy), only one journal (Journal of Place Management and Development), which had just been launched, addressed the full spectrum of town and city management incorporating all its sub-disciplines under one roof, even if the journal's main target audience remained academics in the Anglo-Saxon world, with little participation from practitioners and academics from non-English speaking countries. Similarly, no journals existed with the aim of presenting the management of town and city centres within its wider spectrum of socio-economic global trends affecting migration flows or consumer behaviour, to mention but a few, or the design and management of urban infrastructure, tourism, environmental interventions or political governance.

The public works outlined and critiqued in this chapter address each of these key knowledge gaps:

- This chapter starts with a review of my work on the Persefones project (2002-2004), which delivered not only Europe's first transnational town and city twinning scheme for small retailers and town centre managers, but produced Europe's largest transnational research survey of small independent retailers based in town centre management schemes in Spain and the UK.
- The second involves the creation in 2005-2007 of a practice-based pan-European typology for town centre management using case studies and definitions of town centre management from across the European Union.
- The third discusses the impact of my role in the creation of three qualifications for practising town centre managers in the UK and overseas over the period 2007-2009 and their role in the wider remit of striving for the professionalization of this field. ,
- The fourth reviews the background, motivation, results, impact and road ahead for my latest initiative (2008-present), which revolves around the creation, delivery and management of a leading international professional journal for academics and practitioners – the Journal of Town and City Management.

In each case, these public works are critiqued with special emphasis on my initial motivating factors, the challenges involved in terms of transnational collaboration with academic and practitioner partners, the development methodologies chosen, the impact of each public work on the community of practice and research in town centre management, as well as reflective considerations on the key lessons learnt from each public work which influenced the development of subsequent public works reviewed in this chapter.

Special attention is paid to the processes of continuous compromise (as opposed to the more established quality principle of *continuous improvement*) I had to engage in at personal and professional levels in my quest for a multidisciplinary approach to

practice and research in town centre management using a global approach, whilst delivering viable solutions at local level.

3.1 The Persefones project (2002-2004)

The Persefones project (2002-2004) represents the start of my career in academia, albeit in an administrative position as the project's Transnational Manager. This project - co-funded with over £1.3 million of European Social Fund EQUAL programme funding - emerged as a result of a need to establish the contribution of small and medium enterprise (SME) retailers to the diversity, viability and vitality of the high street (Baron et al, 2001; Byrom et al, 2002; O'Callaghan and O'Riordan, 2003) in view of previous research, which suggested that the fragmentation of this sector (Fernie, 1992) coupled with the increasing dominance of multinational retail chains in town centres (Medway et al, 2000; Crewe, 2000) were leading to a phenomenon of progressive standardisation of Britain's high streets (MacGillivray et al, 2002) coined later by the New Economics Foundation as "clone town Britain" (Conisbee et al, 2004; Simms et al, 2005).

My contribution to this project as Transnational Manager was multifaceted. On the one hand, I became responsible for the design, planning and delivery of a major research study of small independent retailers in the UK and Spain with assistance from our transnational Spanish partners – an activity that was more in line with that of an academic rather than a project manager on an administrative university contract. On the other hand, I had the management responsibility to provide the support mechanisms for this research output to materialise using, where possible, existing networks within our partnership, including a network of fourteen of the largest chambers of commerce in Andalucia (southern Spain). Given that the locations in Spain were fixed by the fact that their chambers of commerce were already partners in the project, the challenge was now to find fourteen towns or cities in the UK to achieve the project bid's required outputs. A discussion with the Chief Executive of the Association of Town Centre Management in the UK resulted in agreement from this organisation for me to use their regional network of members to approach potential candidates. I achieved this with the help of ATCM and the support of Manchester Metropolitan University's press office

(<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/news/news-items/89/>), who kindly offered also to publicise our project's aims along with an application for towns and cities to participate in a programme that I decided should be driven by innovation and pragmatism from its outset.

My philosophy here was influenced not only by my knowledge of Spanish culture as a native of that country but also as an experienced manager in the private sector with seven years of practice in a variety of international engineering projects where theory was often secondary to application. In line with this aspiration, and as part of my proposal for the design of this twinning programme, I carried out a review of best practice in town twinning programmes (European Commission, 2000; Ahmad, 2001; Cremer et al, 2001; World Health Organisation, 2001). One of the key outcomes of this review was that no twinning programme had ever been created for town centre managers and small retailers. Instead, most programmes had focused on a beneficiary group (e.g. HIV sufferers, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, etc), even if the figureheads of each town/city tended to be local authority chief executives and elected politicians. Partly as a result of this, many twinning programmes in the past had suffered from lack of continuity and sustainability as beneficiary target groups were seldom given the chance to become the 'face' of their communities and, as politicians came and went, twinning links dwindled or became cooler.

It was as a result of these findings that I decided from the outset of this twinning programme that, in addition to being the first of its kind (town centre managers and small independent retailers) in Europe at the time (<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/news/articles/112/>), a key element of innovation should involve the lack of VIPs as representatives of towns. Instead, the people elected to represent their town (one small retailer and one town centre manager) should be chosen by their peers and it would be these people that would become responsible for the day-to-day work with their twins rather than just travelling to transnational photo workshops in Spain and the UK with little understanding of the work involved. My aim was for this value-driven decision making to influence the sustainability of this twinning network well before its inception, in line with project cycle management theory and practice. The overall strategic aim of this programme was set to:

“... offer small retailers, town centre managers, chambers of commerce and representatives of trade associations from both countries [Spain and Great Britain] an interdisciplinary forum in which to share, explore and discuss initiatives concerned with protecting and promoting the diversity of the small retail sector in the high streets of every twinned town/city.” (Coca-Stefaniak, 2003; p. 5)

Somewhat to my surprise, the level of transnational coordination and cooperation required to set this twinning network in place with sustainability as an overarching strategic objective was considerable and rather unexpected in scale. Once the fourteen participating British town and cities had been selected using a competitive process open to all members of the Association of Town Centre Management, I decided that, in order to improve the chances of this twinning network's survival into the future, each pair of towns should be twinned based on a detailed assessment of their shared strategic challenges, where project coordinators (including myself) should merely play a facilitator role. This decision was firmly rooted in my previous experience as a practitioner in mineral resources management where international partnerships formed for the exploration and production of resources often relied on a shared set of values and a clear project focus.

The network was then provided with opportunities to meet face to face every six months presenting on their preliminary twinning work results, whilst carrying out the day-to-day communication via emails and dedicated website-based transnational discussion fora. Methodologically, as project manager and facilitator in this transnational twinning programme, I adopted a participant-observer ethnographic approach which I complemented through my appointment in 2003 as Secretary of the UK-based Independent Retailers Confederation (100,000 members), which provided the secretariat to the All Party Group for Small Retailers based in the Houses of Parliament (<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmallparty/register/shops.htm>). This allowed me to follow discussions not only at policy-making level in the UK but also transnationally (Spain-Great Britain) between small retailers and town centre managers working in different cultures but with common problems. A combination of this ethnographic approach and further qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews carried out in conjunction with project partners in Spain

resulted first in a conference paper about the small independent Spanish retail sector (Parker et al, 2003), in which I was co-author with project colleagues from Manchester Metropolitan University Business School and our key Spanish transnational partner – D'Aleph consultants.

This paper was based on a study involving seventy small retailers located in three town centre management schemes in southern Spain. A few years later, this conference paper achieved publication in the *International Journal of Business and Globalisation* (Parker et al, 2007). The paper's main findings included that the majority (63%) of key informants (small retail owners and managers) interviewed had a negative perception of the state of retail business in their town centre, though business longevity was also found to be closely linked to this perception. In fact, generally speaking, the longer a business had traded in the city centre, the more negative its owner's view tended to be of the state of trade in the area, irrespective of their retail area of specialisation. Similarly, 59% of interviewees expressed a sense of gloom about the future of retail trade in their area, particularly where food retailers prevailed, in spite of the fact that only 28% of respondents actually thought that their town centre did not attract local residents. Most respondents appeared to share a lack of ownership in making their town centre more attractive to visitors as the majority considered that remediating this problem was ultimately up to the local authority.

At a more micro level, small retail outlet owners appeared to focus their business strategies on better service, quality or product range instead of more sustainable competitive strategies such as differentiation or niche marketing. Yet, one of the main outcomes of this research that ultimately influenced the twinning scheme and the much larger transnational research survey study carried out in conjunction with this twinning scheme was the apparent disparity that emerged in the level of negativity among respondents about the state of retail trade in their town centres. Indeed, it appeared that a collective 'doom and gloom' sense of foreboding could 'infect' entire shopping districts locally only to be dispelled by much higher levels of optimism in a town located only 15 km away. This finding, which could not be investigated further as part of this initial study, influenced my approach to the implementation of the twinning scheme and its associated transnational survey of small retailers as it dawned upon me how localised collective perceptions could be, particularly in tightly knit communities in southern Spain. As a result of this, and

following lengthy discussions with project colleagues in Spain and the UK, I decided that the research survey should not only evaluate perceptions of retailers in Spain and the UK, but also do so taking into account the different lifecycle states each business may have covered in addition to its geographical location within any given town centre management scheme. Furthermore, it became evident that, although methodologically it would be desirable to study the results of the survey using a comparative approach transnationally, a more local approach should be equally taken to the analysis of the data in order to capture potential area-based collective sentiment which may have potentially influenced the perceptions of individual respondents and introduced potential 'noise' into the overall data set.

My role in designing, implementing and managing the transnational twinning network of towns and cities became fundamental to the success of the survey as my participant observer (facilitator) research strategy slowly evolved to a more positivist one in order to carry out a survey of small independent retailers in each of the twenty eight participating town centre management schemes in southern Spain and Great Britain. In each case, the town centre manager acted as a key informant in a similar fashion to previous ethnographic studies (e.g. McGrath, 1989), which facilitated access to retailers considerably both through local publicity about the survey in advance of its taking place and in reassuring potential respondents about the study's aims and objectives (informing policy making related to retail and town centre management) in a sector where lack of trust towards local authorities tends to be commonplace (Tomalin and Pal, 1994; Hogg et al, 2003). This field research strategy did not only ultimately help to achieve better response rates but, in a rather unexpected turn of events, it secured the buy-in from key stakeholders in each town centre management scheme, including town centre managers and, in the case of Spain, local retail trade associations.

After four months of face-to-face surveys carried out in Spain and the UK, where I often joined field research teams to help out in the administration of questionnaires and motivate overworked and underpaid field researchers in the same hands-on way I used to motivate mining crews in some of the more gruesome tasks of my previous job, we achieved what still remains the largest ever European transnational study of small independent retailers with 1,200 respondents with an average response rate of 23%.

My task as researcher and research manager of this major transnational survey remains retrospectively immense and I almost shudder now when I reflect on the difficulties I faced and how I managed to overcome them through a combination of dogged perseverance and blind optimism. Not only was this my first ever market research survey, but I had the responsibility for designing, coordinating and delivering it on the ground in two countries and in two languages (English and Spanish) in spite of the fact that I had never been involved in a market research survey before in my life. The learning curve I had to engage from the outset to acquire the research and management skills necessary to accomplish this was immense and, upon reflection, I often felt out of my depth next to colleagues who had, on average, over ten years of experience with this type of research. In spite of this, my administrative position as project manager worked in my favour as the methodological expectations from me were always lower than they would have been from an academic.

I was also fortunate to be able to engage in a fascinating research culture learning process from academic colleagues in the UK and consultancy-based colleagues in Spain that provided me with transnational insights into aspects of market research (e.g. stakeholder engagement, respondent management) that I have never since come across in research methods textbooks but have been able to discuss with my students as a result of this experience. A key example of a major stakeholder obstacle faced with this transnational survey was the sudden unexpected refusal of our Spanish project partner to carry out the research survey as a result of “lack of sufficient budget funding” in spite of the fact that this activity had been earmarked in the budget with an identical funding amount in both countries. A series of meetings in Seville that bordered at times with acrimony (I was prepared to report this partner to the European Commission for breach of transnational partnership agreement) eventually resulted in a compromise whereby I consented to other project activities (e.g. key performance indicators) to be scaled down in Spain in order to free up funds to support what remained our top research priority for this project.

In spite of the successful outcome of these negotiations, and in spite of my excellent personal relationship with our Spanish colleagues, I remain blissfully unaware still today with regards to whether this was an attempt by the Spanish project director to manipulate the project or whether indeed he remains guilty of misappropriation of European funds. In project management terms, this resulted in a major learning

point for me which, given the chance of going back in time, I would have tried to pre-empt through fostering a much closer involvement of our Spanish partner's senior project management team in the operational aspects of the project. Moreover, upon reflection, this was probably the start (or perhaps a hidden continuation?) of a personal and professional journey where compromise has emerged as a major common denominator that has marked my life since at many levels. This complex (and rather personal) theme is one I have attempted to explore in more depth throughout this contextual statement through a critically reflective approach.

As the lead researcher in this research study of town centre small retailers in Spain and Great Britain, which I initiated with what remains my first ever non-engineering academic literature review, I was finally able to co-present its key findings at the Current Issues in Retail Marketing (CIRM) conference held at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School in 2004 (Coca-Stefaniak and Parker, 2004) in what remains my first ever paper presentation at an academic-practitioner conference in retail and marketing. I had only delivered one other (practitioner) paper presentation before (in 1999) but this was in an altogether different field – mining engineering (see Coca-Stefaniak and Pettit, 1999). Following on from the success of my co-authored conference paper on the findings of the transnational survey, I then led a wider team of co-authoring colleagues from the UK and Spain in the submission of a paper to the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, which was accepted with only minor modifications (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2005a).

Although this journal paper presented only some of our preliminary findings at the time, its fundamental significance was in the sense that it was the first transnational European study of small independent retailers of this scale ever published in a journal. Our key findings included that a higher proportion of respondents in Spain (96%) than Great Britain (20%) appeared to be subsistence-level retail businesses with an annual turnover of less than 150,000 Euros for whom the main reason (36%) for going into business in the first place had been “to continue the family business”, whereas the overriding motivation for British small retailers (36%) was instead “to be my own boss”. Similarly, three times as many small retailers in Britain than in Spain had a business plan. Overall, the data seemed to suggest that although small independent retailers in Spain were at a stage of decline experienced by Britain decades earlier, many of the respondents in Spain remained genuinely family-owned enterprises. Furthermore, Spanish retailers enjoyed a lot

more institutional support from regional and national government than their British counterparts. All in all, this research study as well as the twinning scheme appeared to have a galvanising effect not only transnationally between Spanish and British twins but, more importantly, between participating town centre managers and small independent retailers. Evidence of this positive effect can be found in some of their statements, which praise the Persephones Project in terms of its ability to contribute to wider local regeneration frameworks:

“Todmorden joined the REN in Spring 2003. Since that time the town has benefited from retail surveys, advice to the small business and retail group, improvements to Customer Service and above all the opportunity of exchange visits with towns in Andalucia. The experiences of retailers and town centre managers in both Spain and the UK has resulted in the development of local networks and projects that will regenerate retail neighbourhoods.

It is important that this vital work continues and expands. The support of academic research matched with professional retail advice is just beginning to show success - it must continue.”

Hilary Brooke
Principal Officer
Partnership Liaison
Regeneration and Development
Directorate
Calderdale Council

In other cases, the twinning programme was praised for its added value in terms of new methods of marketing places (often town centres) through the exchange of good practices by twinning partners:

“Bury MBC participated in the Retail Enterprise Network with particular focus on Radcliffe town centre, one of our key regeneration priorities. Our involvement in the Retail Enterprise Network complemented the physical

regeneration of the town, in particular the twinning, which focused on sharing best practice on marketing the town centre and engaging businesses with our twins. Overall we found our involvement in the Retail Enterprise Network extremely useful and feel that the best practice developed through the project will support us in improving our town centres.”

Heather Clark
Strategy Resources & European
Manager
Economic Development
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Others, in this case a small independent retailer, praised the value of the twinning programme with regards to its ability to create communities of practice with open discussion fora that resulted in improvements to their town and their business:

“I have been in retailing for 30 years and have sought academic and government business support on many occasions only to be told that retail was excluded. This is the only project I have seen with meaningful support for the small retail sector of the economy.

One of the aims of the REN project is to treat everybody as an equal partner. I have seen this in many mission statements but only in the words. This project actually treats all participants equally and it shows. I was very impressed.

I have met at least 50 small retail stakeholders from all parts of the UK and Andalucia. We had many different problems and solutions. The REN project has created a community of academics, retailers and town centre managers. By discussing these problems and looking at the various solutions put forward by academics and business people I have been able to solve some of the problems I have in my own business.”

Robert Nicklas
Director
Thearne Pet Stores
Hull

Recognition for the impact of this project also came from the European Commission in the form of its inclusion as a case study (the transnational cooperation between the UK-based Retail Enterprise Network project and the Spain-based Tiyyaradapt project) in a publication about entrepreneurship (European Commission, nd), in addition to articles published by local press across the 28 twinned towns.

In spite of all this success, and spurred perhaps by the many compromises I had to make along the way, I felt that accomplishing the strategic goals of the project was not enough by itself. In my view, for sustainability to be achieved on a wider scale in the struggle to protect and encourage diverse town centres, it was not enough to have a footprint in the local press of a few towns and cities from our twinning programme. Similarly, it was not enough to have the preliminary results of the study published internationally in peer-reviewed journals. Indeed, a form of legacy had to be left not only for the towns that participated in the twinning to keep on their office shelves but, more crucially, to share with the world the steps followed in the design, implementation and key outcomes of this unique transnational twinning network for small retailers and town centre managers.

In view of this, and working with a colleague from Manchester Metropolitan University, I co-edited a book that explained our twinning process, the best practice in twinning that had influenced the design of our programme and, crucially, outlined the case studies developed by each town centre scheme as a result of their joint work with their twins in the solution of specific common problems in each case (Coca-Stefaniak and Oldfield, 2005).

In spite of all this work, which combined academic research skills (e.g. transnational survey) and practical project management (e.g. twinning programme), one of the things that became evident to me, particularly in discussions with conference delegates and project colleagues was that, although we had managed to find answers to some of the research objectives we had set ourselves with regards to the role of small independent retailers in providing diversity and vitality to the high streets of towns in southern Spain and Great Britain, we had only scratched the surface with regards to the influence of the wider retail environment – the high street itself. Indeed, our focus had been sometimes too narrowly set on the skills set, attributes and perceptions of the retailer, neglecting somewhat the fact that, in many

cases, the attractiveness of the locations where these retailers traded was as important or even more to their success than their ability to run their businesses efficiently and competitively.

Similarly, although the twinning programme showed that the relationship between small independent retailers and town centre management differed substantially between the UK and Spain, the constraints of the overall project's objectives and its associated funding theme from the European Commission prevented us from investigating this further using the multidisciplinary approach that this topic deserved. It was as a result of all this that I joined a bid writing team for further European funding that would allow me to explore these knowledge gaps through a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach and, if possible, extend the research to a wider network of European countries. Once the research funding for this was secured towards the end of 2005, it became possible to start work on phase two of my quest towards understanding the intricacy of the socio-economic fabric of successfully managed town centres. The research process involved and its main outcomes are discussed in the next section –the European typology of town centre management partnerships.

Reflective conclusions on key personal learning points

- In large transnational research projects, it is important to keep senior management engaged in the research design and implementation process for ownership to be nurtured. This may be particularly applicable to more collectivist and hierarchical business cultures.
- Although compromise may be a very effective management tool, particularly in environments where a formal disciplinary procedure cannot be enforced (e.g. multi-stakeholder project partnerships, informal transnational alliances), the high personal energy demands that compromise entails should never be underestimated, particularly when tight project deadlines are involved.
- Collective culture and perceptions can be very powerful, particularly in tightly knit communities such as small and medium town centre retailers in southern Spain. These ingrained perceptions can skew statistical analyses dramatically. The only way to let these perceptions emerge and inform

research design is to carry out qualitative explorative research that captures these perceptions and their causes effectively.

- Even the best retail mix offer with highly skilled and motivated retailers will often not be enough to make a town centre competitive unless it can offer an attractive environment for residents, visitors and inward investors. In most cases, this requires careful planning, management and a visionary approach to the future.

3.2 European typology of town centre management partnerships (2005-2007)

My work on the Persefones project (2002-2004) represented a major personal breakthrough in my professional career. This was not limited to the fact that it was my first experience of managing a major transnational European project or the fact that retail as a field of knowledge was still relatively new to me at that stage.

The key element I discovered through this work was town centre management in a very different format to how it had been understood and practised in the UK to that date.

Although at the time this concept was still in its infancy in Spain, it had been led from its outset by local associations of small independent retailers, which was in sharp contrast to the local authority-led models in operation in the UK at the time (Stubbs et al, 2002; Reeve, 2004; Warnaby et al, 2005). However, most of these partnership schemes in Spain at the time were either embryonic or relatively young, with many not surpassing five years of existence. Additionally, the vast majority of these schemes were focused almost solely on retail (Castresana, 1999; Sánchez del Río, 2001).

It was almost by chance - a brief mention in conversation with one of our project partners - that I became aware of the second oldest town centre management scheme in Spain with eleven years of existence at the time – Granollers. A fact-finding trip to this town, located a mere twenty minutes by train east of Barcelona,

revealed one of the most visionary town centre management schemes I have ever visited. Their value-led management system was augmented by an almost daring approach to the management of a town centre. Their motto offered a glimpse into this – “city, culture and retail”. Their concept did not just involve increasing retail spend by customers or an increase in visitors to the town centre. It embraced the entire idiosyncrasy of a town centre as a living place with a rich historical past, a present where citizens should be given the chance to interact with daily decision-making and policy debates, and a future where local identity should provide the glue for a kaleidoscope of stakeholders ... and all this created and implemented by local retailers’ associations without any cooperation from the local authority. To me, this was a complete revelation and, upon reflection, it initiated a process of profound change in my thinking towards town centre management. I had finally found evidence that a town centre management scheme need not be dominated by commercial interests or, alternatively, constitute a mere project by the local authority to engage local businesses and implement public spending savings as a result.

In a figurative way, I had found my own Dr. Livingstone. Ontologically, this event marked an inflexion point in my evolution as a researcher. In a move rather rare for academics, I shifted my positioning from that of a pure ethnographic observer to an observer-participant by deliberately co-authoring a paper on Granollers with the team that ran this town centre management scheme in spite of the fact that none of my co-authors spoke English and that common academic wisdom would tend to avoid this in favour of single-author publications or co-authoring with academic colleagues rather than practitioners. Our paper was published in the *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management* without any modifications suggested by reviewers (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2005b). This was soon followed by an interview with me in Granollers aired on primetime television on one of Catalonia’s most viewed channels – TV5. The experience of being greeted spontaneously by complete strangers on the streets of Granollers soon afterwards is one that I still recall very fondly today.

In many ways, Granollers and the publication of this paper, gave me the confidence to persevere with my nonconformist approach to town centre management – I finally had the evidence that innovative, value-based and participatory town centre management was not a utopian goal but a very possible and viable model. Yet, (positivist) academic research convention in the social sciences indicated that it

would be difficult to propose a change in approach to town centre management without first carrying out a review and synthesis of existing approaches across Europe in the form of a classification system. Although this conclusion - which was influenced partly by conversations with academic colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School - represented ontologically a step back into positivism in an act of temporary personal compromise, I came to the conclusion that the evident knowledge gap that existed in this field at the time not only lent itself to an opportunity for publication but, crucially, it would provide my Granollers case study, in due course, with a higher level of conceptual credibility within the academic community.

Beyond this more strategic view, there were also a few additional motivating factors for developing this European typology of town centre management schemes. Epistemologically, although an attempt had been made previously to classify British town centre management schemes (Warnaby et al, 1998), this study had failed to produce a typology able to include and compare the diverse nature of schemes that existed across Europe. Similarly, although studies had reviewed the evolution of town centre management, the concept had been approached in a purely UK-centric fashion, which resulted in a rather skewed and certainly incomplete understanding of the history of practice and thinking in this field internationally. The same issue applied to other countries where, in spite of a growing body of knowledge related to town centre management in Italy (Moras et al., 2004; Zanderighi, 2004; Codato et al., 2005), Spain (Martín Rojas, 1997; Dirección General de Comercio Interior, 1998; Sánchez del Río, 2001) and elsewhere (Sandahl and Lindh, 1995; Forsberg et al., 1999; Cossardeaux, 1999), researchers had seldom attempted to approach the topic using a more holistic comparative approach (Reeves, 2004).

Additionally, and from a more pedagogic and didactic standpoint, this lack of credible practice-based typologies made it difficult to explore visually with students and town centre management practitioners how these schemes may evolve in one direction or another to respond to evolving strategic challenges.

My first challenge to achieve this was not to do a mere literature review. It needed to be a multi-lingual one that addressed sources from key European countries in the development of practice in town centre management over the period 1988 to 2005, namely Spain, Italy, France, the UK and Germany. Equally, the work would require

a good understanding of contemporary practice in these countries as well as familiarity with sources of publications on the topic. I soon realised that a mere team of academic UK-based colleagues would not suffice. This required engaging a respected practitioner with a global view and at least another multi-lingual academic to tackle sources in Italian, French and German. I could contribute to the work with three languages (Spanish, English and Polish) and a good understanding of town centre management in Spain and the UK, but I had greater knowledge gaps with regards to practice and research carried out in other countries, not to mention an insufficient level of Italian, French and German to take responsibility for this part of the research.

The advent of a new successful bid for European funding with the securing of a further £2.3 million of ESF-EQUAL funding in the shape of a transnational project named “Agora” brought me closer to this goal. The Association of Town Centre Management was a key partner in this project and its Chief Executive at the time possessed an unparalleled understanding of European approaches to town centre management from a practice-based perspective. Almost simultaneously, a chance encounter with a polyglot Italian academic colleague on a research sabbatical at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School brought the opportunity to deal with the research team’s language gaps required for this pan-European study. As a compromise, and given that most research team members did not feel sufficiently competent in their use of the German language, this geographical sphere of research and practice was dropped.

The resulting literature review that emerged several months later under my guidance as lead author suggested a very diverse approach to town centre management with a clear cultural north-south European divide. In southern European countries (e.g. Portugal, Spain, Italy) the management of town and city centres was mainly carried out by local retail associations through informal partnership schemes with little if any support from local authorities, whereas northern countries (e.g. UK, Austria, Sweden) often favoured more formalised partnerships with legal standing and firmly supported by the local authority. Yet, the core funding of these partnerships was often less clear cut. Although, generally speaking, northern European countries tended to favour private funding sources over public ones, town centre management schemes in the UK had evolved originally from traditional local authority-led and funded interventions. Similarly,

although in southern Europe the instigators of town centre management were often private sector organisations (mainly small and medium-sized independent retailers), their initial private funding budgets were increasingly matched by public sector funding drawn from a variety of sources, including local, regional national and wider European Union programmes.

Another major finding of this study was that initial (UK-centred) attempts at a classification of town centre management schemes could not conceptualise these trends or showcase the diversity of pan-European practice. As a result of this, and following extensive consultation with our team members, we developed a conceptual two-dimensional typology of European town centre management schemes based around two variables – main source of funding (public versus private) and partnership structure (formal versus informal). I submitted this as a part of a full paper to the journal *Cities*. A few months later, it emerged from reviewers' feedback that one of the main obstacles to the paper's publication was the lack of primary data to support the proposed typology. By this time, the "Agora" project was under way, albeit in its initial stages. A parallel project - "TOCEMA" - with European INTERREG IIIC programme funding and secured by the Association of Town Centre Management offered also interesting synergies with "Agora" as both projects involved research on town centre management across European countries. While the "Agora" project placed a bigger emphasis on innovation and had a somewhat narrower partnership geographically (five organisations focusing mainly on training in four European countries), the "TOCEMA" project involved a much larger partnership of eight countries with all major European national town centre management associations represented and with a focus on knowledge exchange and management rather than innovation.

The initial enthusiasm from the journal's editor about the topic of the paper coupled with the feedback from reviewers for the need of primary research, ideally in the form of case studies, spurred our team to provide a framework for research that effectively joined both projects under a common publishable output. As lead author, I developed the case study questionnaire and, with the help of project partners on the ground in each country, got it translated into five languages (Polish, Spanish, Italian, Swedish and German). Our local country partners also acted as key informants in an ethnographic sense by facilitating contact with some of the more interesting town centre management practitioners in each country. A set of fifteen

separate case study questionnaire responses were obtained from as many locations across Europe and I subsequently developed them into case studies with additional interaction with respondents to fill in knowledge gaps and expand on specific elements of innovation as they came to light. I then mapped these case studies on to the typology of our paper and selected four for final inclusion in the paper so as to illustrate each of the typology's four categories. Once this was completed, I rewrote the concluding remarks of the paper to provide a more challenging view of the future ahead for town centre management across Europe and the paper was finally published (Coca-Stefaniak et al, 2009).

The publication of this typology in an academic journal, combined with the growing practitioner interest in the case study series I co-authored with town centre managers from various countries across Europe (Quilliot and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Ahlqvist and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Rinaldi and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Fitzgerald and Coca-Stefaniak, 2005; Panadero et al, 2006; Russel et al, 2007; Lobendanz et al, 2007) - most of which were also made publicly accessible on the Association of Town Centre Management's website (www.atcm.org) - spurred an unexpected level of attention from government sources, which culminated in the use of this typology by a major training publication for town centre managers commissioned by the UK Government's Department for Communities and Local Government (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2008; p. 27). The focus of this publication on England and Wales meant that it did not make use of my international case studies of town centre management schemes. However, another publication similar to this one, though this time by the Spanish identified this as an opportunity even sooner and included a number of my publicly available case studies in their training manual for town centre managers in Spain, also available in the public domain (Estevan-Vitores et al, 2007; pp. 111-122).

The development of this European typology of town centre management partnerships not only synthesised existing town centre management practice across Europe into a logical framework that allowed to show how models could evolve and transform in terms of two variables (source of funding and level of formality of partnership) but, crucially, established a first didactical milestone in terms of conveying this knowledge visually to university students and town centre management practitioners. Equally, its simplicity in terms of visual representation provided a challenging starting point for discussions with postgraduate students at a

time when my teaching responsibilities at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School were developing rapidly towards curriculum design. These included the creation, validation, content development and delivery of two new qualifications, namely the Introductory Diploma in Place Management and the MSc in Place Management, which are discussed in more detail in the next section. It was partly in recognition for my involvement in these that I was appointed in 2008 Fellow of the Institute of Place Management as I started my new job as Senior Lecturer at the University of the Arts London.

Reflective conclusions on key personal learning points

- Value-based and participatory town centre management models such as that pioneered by the small retailers of Granollers - near Barcelona - can provide viable (and tested) alternatives to current practice in town centre management.
- Ontological compromise in research can often be the only way to push etymological boundaries. It is only by adopting this pragmatic stance that I have managed to show that viable alternatives to UK-led town centre management practice exist on a major scale across Europe, and not just in isolated pockets of good practice as previously thought by many practitioners and researchers in the UK.
- Although the UK can boast some of the oldest European examples of practice in town centre management, this concept has emerged and evolved across many other European countries in ways that often offer viable alternatives to the traditional local authority-led models of the UK. More importantly, the organic nature of many models across southern Europe makes them much more flexible to evolve in a number of directions without the constraints of the formalised schemes that tend to prevail in northern European countries. In many ways, the source of conceptual innovation in this profession may have shifted from the UK to southern Europe, though this may be adversely influenced by recent global trends, including the 2008 banking crisis.

3.3 Public work 3 – Development and delivery of qualifications for town centre managers (2006-2010)

In 2005, town centre management in the UK was already an established discipline with over twenty years of practice, a growing academic research following and a considerable growth in partnership schemes across the UK (Figure 2), which reached six hundred in 2005.

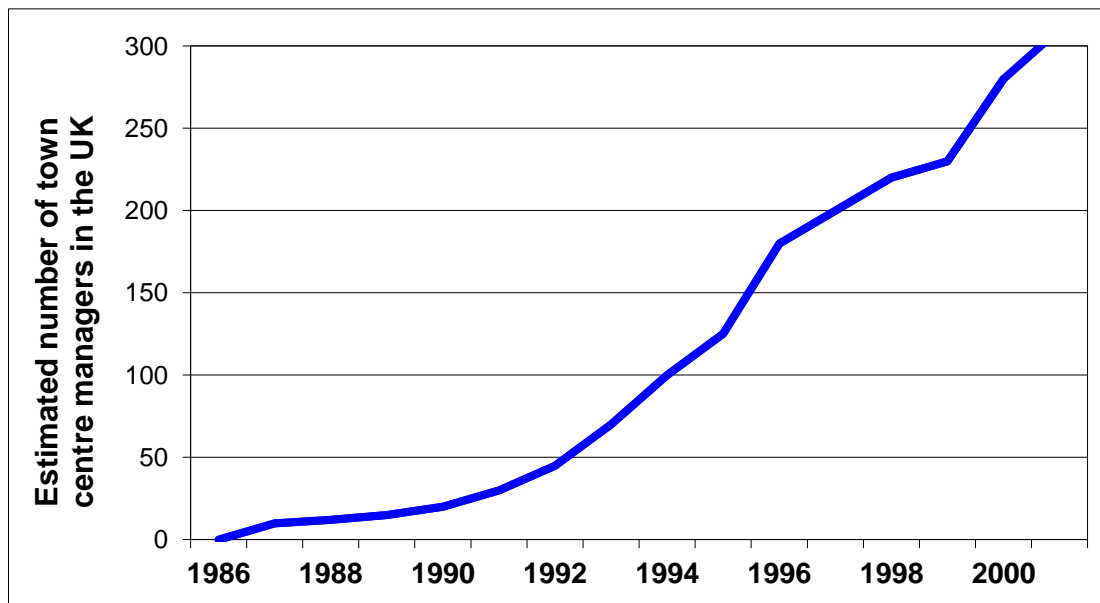


Figure 2. Town centre managers in the UK (adapted from Warnaby et al, 1998 with figures from the Association of Town Centre Management)

Yet, in spite of a growing recognition of this function by professional and trade bodies such as the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, British Retail Consortium or the Royal Town Planning Institute, among others (Warnaby et al, 1998), town centre management remained a difficult function to define or even be recognised by the general public and, in many cases, by senior management in the very local authorities that employed many of these town centre managers (Whyatt, 2004). Just as architects, urban planners, engineers, medical doctors, accountants or solicitors enjoyed a level of recognition easy to define by society and with clear

links to a defined professional status through approved professional bodies often incorporated in the UK by Royal Charter (e.g. Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, Chartered Institute of Bankers, Institution of Civil Engineers, Royal Institute of British Architects, Chartered Institute of Marketing), this was not the case for town centre management.

Furthermore, town centre management *per se*, although encouraged by UK urban planning legislation, was not a statutory requirement in 2005. As a result of this, local authorities' commitment to this function was in many cases secondary in terms of budgets and resources to other statutory town and city management functions such as urban planning, conservation of heritage, culture (e.g. entry charges to museums and galleries) or environmental management (e.g. disposal of waste, monitoring and reporting of greenhouse emissions), which were mandatory by law. Instead, town centre managers have a wide remit of duties that range from economic development to environmental, management of culture through events, urban development/planning and housing, to mention but a few. Yet, the galvanising role of the town centre manager in terms of bringing different local authority departments together under a single holistic umbrella has often been interpreted as a supporting one rather than having a strategic management function, not to mention paying any consideration to the need for its inclusion in the law as a statutory function.

As a consequence of this, and in line with the strategic objectives of the AGORA project outlined in section 3.3, my research group at Manchester Metropolitan University agreed that two key strands should be developed to initiate the process of achieving professional recognition for town centre management, namely:

1. The creation of a professional body for this function in cooperation with the Association of Town Centre Management. This body would receive the name of the Institute of Place Management.
2. The development of qualifications for town centre managers that would allow professionals in this field to address skills gaps and training needs, initiate a Continuous Professional Development process for membership progression within the Institute of Place Management and influence debates affecting the development of this new profession.

Although I played a substantial role in the achievement of the first goal, i.e. the creation of the Institute of Place Management, which culminated in my appointment as Fellow in 2008, my main task as newly appointed programmes manager of the Institute of Place Management was to address objective 2.

As I set out to deal with the development of qualifications for town centre managers, it soon appeared that there were two major obstacles to be overcome:

1. Fields of competency. In spite of the fact that I had worked with town centre managers as part of the twinning programme devised for the Persefones project (2002-2004) and that the Association of Town Centre Management were our partners in this endeavour to develop qualifications, little knowledge (if any) existed on the fields of knowledge and skills that a town centre manager required to carry out her/his job.
2. Level of qualification. Although I was aware of the existence of a number of learning programmes for town centre managers in Europe (I had been a Guest Lecturer on the Diploma in City Marketing at the University of Valencia in Spain with a cohort that included mainly local town centre managers from the region of Valencia), little knowledge existed on potential competitor programmes in the UK and continental Europe.

A desk survey directed by me with the support of members of my research team revealed that, although a postgraduate entry programme had existed at Oxford Brookes University a few years earlier, there existed no programmes in the UK at the time specifically designed for town centre managers. In fact, and as most programmes focused on fields of knowledge and practice already subject to professional accreditation (e.g. urban planning, architecture/urbanism), it soon became apparent that there was a market gap for a town centre management qualification, which could be extended to other European countries. Parallel to this desk research, I designed and launched an online survey of members of the Association of Town Centre Management with the aim of establishing, among other things, what level of qualifications town centre managers possessed at the time and what fields they were in. This would allow me to make a more informed decision with regards to the level of qualification to be developed.

The survey, which was subsequently run transnationally with assistance from national town centre management associations such as the Asociacion de Gerentes de Centros Urbanos (AGECU) in Spain and Svenska Stadsbornor in Sweden, produced some rather unexpected results. Firstly, the response rate to the online survey was better than expected, with 101 respondents from the UK (18% of all UK-based ATCM members) in 2006, 51 respondents from Spain (approx. 29% of all AGECU members) in 2006 and 31 respondents from Sweden (21% of all Sweden-based Svenska Stadsbornor members) in the 2007 edition of this transnational survey.

Table 1. Highest qualifications held by town centre managers (Coca-Stefaniak, 2007).

Highest qualification held	UK (2006)	Spain (2006)	Sweden (2007)
Master degree, MBA or PhD	20%	31%	10%
University degree	32%	35%	7%
Diploma	22%	23%	16%
Vocational / A-level	15%	8%	45%

This survey revealed some of the considerable differences that exist across Europe with regards to approaches to study and qualifications. For instance, while in the UK 52% of town centre managers had at least a university degree, only 17% of their Swedish colleagues did. Instead, in Scandinavia it would appear that vocational qualifications are a much more popular pathway to continuous professional development, particularly in view of the fact that there is no published research evidence which would suggest town centre managers enjoy a lower professional status than in other European countries.

More importantly, and in spite of the fact that town centre management practice in the UK is at least ten years older than in other European countries such as Spain, this survey revealed that town centre management practice in the UK did not appear to be proportionately ahead of Spain in terms of the strategic influence and focus of town centre managers who still spent a considerable proportion of their time

organising events and carrying out marketing activities for their town centre partnerships instead of influencing strategic processes related to regeneration, transport or economic development (Table 2).

Table 2. Fields of practice for town centre managers in the UK and Spain (Coca-Stefaniak, 2007).

Question: what activities take up most of your working time? (top ten listed only)	UK (order of priority)	Spain (order of priority)
People and partnerships	1	4
Marketing	2	2
Strategic planning	3	7
Finance and funding	4	5
Events	5	8
Retail development	6	1
Safety and security	7	12
Economic development	8	9
Administration	9	3
Transport	10	11
Health issues	-	6
Tourism and leisure	13	10

Although this survey allowed me to have an insight into what town centre managers spent their time doing as well as the fields of knowledge they wanted to pursue for further training and/or qualifications, its greatest value was in terms of positioning the state of development of the profession in the UK and elsewhere with respect to the strategic-level work that had helped other professions (e.g. urban planners, architects) to secure statutory level and influence in policy decision-making at local, regional and national levels. This helped me to start work on the development of a framework for qualifications at Manchester Metropolitan University that would span the full spectrum of qualifications and professional involvement enjoyed by town centre managers in the UK from entry level and rather operational to the more

strategic and critical thinking level. In line with this, I developed two qualifications (both as programme leader) that would help to address both ends of the spectrum:

- The Introductory Diploma in Place Management; and
- The MSc Place Management

After much debate with colleagues at the university with respect to the focus of the Introductory Diploma in Place Management, it was decided that it should contain the following modules:

- Place and stakeholders
- Information and communication
- Consultation and partnerships
- Turning ideas into action
- Quality, continuous improvement and change

As part of this work, I developed a full student handbook for this programme, which included learning outcomes for each session (see Appendix). A quick glance at these modules and their specific learning outcomes will reveal that not all are entirely aligned with the key areas of work of town centre managers outlined in Table 2 above. This was largely due to a collective decision to accredit this programme with the Chartered Management (CMI), which meant that modules had to map directly on to the CMI's Introductory Diploma in Management. Important areas such as technological, political, economic and social issues affecting the management of town centres were never covered by the programme though I highlighted this to the board of directors of the Institute of Place Management as feedback for future editions of the programme. In the end, commercial pressures for the sustainability of this programme beyond the EU project funding that helped to design it and start it off dictated that CMI accreditation should take preference over content. Although part of my feedback would be eventually taken on board for a new version of this programme two years later, at the time I reported on these programme weaknesses, my contract at Manchester Metropolitan University was nearing its end and, without any assurances of a renewal, I had to concentrate my energy on finding another position elsewhere rather than arguing for the changes to be implemented immediately.

Upon reflection, although it may appear that I compromised on this issue, the word *resignation* would probably describe much better my state of mind at the time. Having left industry for what I was led to believe would be a permanent position in the public sector at the university, I found to my dismay that I had become another pawn in a growing community of university employees on temporary contracts.

In spite of all this, the Introductory Diploma in Place Management enjoyed a reasonable level of success with over twenty five students in two cohorts in the programme's first edition starting in January 2007 (ATCM, 2007). My work on this programme did not involve only its development, marketing, management and delivery (I led four out of five module workshops inviting guest lecturers where appropriate), but I also designed its evaluation, which I planned out in terms of students' perception of their achievement of the learning outcomes of each module, which enabled me to run the programme dynamically following a continuous improvement management philosophy for forthcoming editions. Feedback from students was very good:

"I would recommend the Introductory Diploma to anyone wishing to receive a thorough grounding in the multi-faceted role of the place manager, from stakeholder engagement to managing finances the course really did tick all the boxes and as such I am better equipped to deal with whatever my job as a TCM throws at me."

- Tina Hanks, Town Centre Manager, Tottenham (IPM, 2008a)

The development and delivery of this Introductory Diploma in Place Management had a considerable impact on my development as a lecturer. It helped me to develop a critical attitude to my pedagogic methods with the help of peer observation as well as written (anonymous) student feedback collected at the end of each module. My steep learning curve involved a full transition from the passive learning and unilateral teaching techniques that I had experienced during much of my formative years at school and as an undergraduate university student (1984-1992) to a more participatory, collaborative and interactive style of learning based on a better understanding of the cognitive processes of student's thinking (Bruer, 1994) and my progressive investigation of distance learning and teaching options

used in blended learning techniques (Valiathan, 2002). In line with this, my teaching became more participatory in style to fit the mind set of my students, who at this stage were ethnically almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon (Kragh and Bislev, 2005).

Peer observation sessions also helped me to realise that, in spite of my best efforts, I remained prone to assumptions with regards to student understanding that I should be prepared to validate more often directly with student cohorts. For instance, I would often take for granted that students should have a good understanding of concepts of management and marketing from modules/courses that were pre-requisites for postgraduate courses I would teach. Equally, I often assumed that mature students with previous work experience would actually have a minimum level of experience that would provide them with a practitioner grounding to visualise and apply management theory and models. This was not often the case and, in fact, it was only through informal interaction with students that I would often discover the early professional specialisation they had experienced in the workplace prior to enrolling on more generic postgraduate management programmes.

Similarly, my transition from leading and teaching on this programme to the higher-level MSc Place Management allowed me to start testing my ability to bridge the gap from passing knowledge to full collaboration with students, in line with Shreeve's (2008) pedagogic "two camps" teacher model, although my first step along this path would come years later as a senior lecturer at University of the Arts London, where I co-authored a joint paper with one of my MA students, which was later published in the Asia Pacific Journal of Arts and Cultural Management (Tay and Coca-Stefaniak, 2010). Although this published paper came at the end of a three-year process of reflection on my pedagogic techniques and approach to students, it enabled me to close the circle of integration of scholarly activity in teaching not only by making reference to my published research but, crucially, by involving students directly in this process and tackling some of their (possible) negative perceptions of research as highlighted by Dwyer (2001).

My work on developing the part-time (3 years) MSc in Place Management as Programme Leader allowed me to take many of the issues discussed with students on the Introductory Diploma to a higher strategic level. For me, this was also the start of an exciting personal development path, which included the rather less exciting - though nevertheless necessary - university validation procedures. Unlike

the Introductory Diploma, where I had pretty much a blank canvas to work with, time constraints and the intricacies of university validation processes meant that compromise had to be sought with regards to module development. After much discussion with teaching colleagues, town centre management practitioners at senior level, my university's head of department and the quality management team for postgraduate qualifications, I decided to use the existing structure and content of the existing MSc Management and add a single purpose-built module on "Place Marketing and Development", which had to be validated, to form a new MSc (Place) Management with the following modules:

- Principles of marketing (10 credits)
- Place marketing and development (20 credits)
- Understanding organisations and stakeholders (20 credits)
- Delivering quality services (10 credits)
- Finance and funding (10 credits)
- Professional and academic capability (20 credits)
- Tools for managing intervention (10 credits)
- Managing change (10 credits)
- Action learning (20 credits)
- Dissertation (60 credits)

Throughout the validation process, and following advice from more experienced colleagues, I emphasised the programme's synergy with existing qualifications at the university, whilst highlighting its strategic fit with the university's drive for closer work with professional bodies on development programmes. I had little choice but to adopt a pragmatic approach to the validation of the "Place marketing and development" module by emphasising its added value to an "otherwise unchanged MSc programme". This conflicted with my values as an individual as I knew that, in essence, this was not true. An MSc Management programme could not be marketed and delivered to students without at least a considerable level of adaptation of existing modules to suit student expectations and development priorities. The addition of a single (newly validated) module could and should not justify effectively the *repurposing* of an existing generic programme to offer it in rebranded format as a specialist MSc.

Similarly, the university's lack of commitment towards the Institute of Place Management beyond the realms and timelines of the European funding received from the European Social Fund's EQUAL programme combined with my disillusionment in seeing a fascinating multidisciplinary field like town centre management reduced (and degraded?) to a mere management process, led me to start questioning my role in this project. Moreover, by the time the MSc Place Management was launched with its first cohort in September of 2007, I had already been told by the Dean of the Business School that my contract which ended six months later, may not be renewed if further European funding could not be found. In spite of my frustration with this lack of commitment by the university after five years of work with a salary always covered in full by European funding, I finally realised my professional dream of teaching at Masters level on two of the programme's initial modules, namely "principles of marketing" and "place marketing and development".

Part of this teaching was done in conjunction with colleagues from the Geography Department by joining my programme's cohort with that of the MSc Urban Regeneration programme based at the Humanities Faculty. This experience of team teaching with a multidisciplinary approach combined with site visits (including students' attendance to the Institute of Place Management's inaugural international conference) and in-class discussions blending research, practice and theory opened my eyes to a world of possibilities I had not experienced at any of the five universities I had studied at before. This amazing personal development experience, which included the joint development of module outlines, teaching plans and materials, and the possibility of discussing strategic issues affecting town centres with students whose professional experience in the field ranged from three to fifteen years, was a fundamental inflection point in my professional career. I discovered a love for teaching, supporting students and questioning of existing knowledge that, in spite of several developments in my life since, have not left me.

Having exercised leadership from the front at Boulby Mine with Anglo American plc as an underground miner first and team supervisor later, and having also experienced leadership from the back as shift manager in charge of thirty five men on night shifts at this same mine, I now began to discover my abilities and affinity for a more transformational leadership style (Walters, 1987; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006), which academia was much better suited for. This ability to lead through enthusiasm, encouragement, intellectual enquiry and multidisciplinary analysis have remained

with me since and continue to be my main motivation for engagement with academia through part-time lecturing in spite of the fact that I now work in the private sector.

By February 2008, and following an offer for a permanent position as Senior Lecturer at London College of Communication (University of the Arts London), I resigned from my post as Senior Lecturer in Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University Business School and left the MSc Place Management to develop a new MSc programme in London. Although I was not proud to join the “gypsy scholar” brigade that some authors (Teeuwen and Hantke, 2007) have already identified as one of higher education’s rising trends in the (naïve?) pursuit of permanent tenure, this move from a business school to an arts-focused university allowed me to explore in more depth the true multidisciplinary nature of town centre management and I soon managed to engage my new colleagues in the building of a new MSc with input from a wide spectrum of disciplines that included culture studies, regeneration, place marketing, sociology and the built environment, among others.

Although the creation of this much more ambitious programme would include cross-faculty teaching as one of its operational challenges, my main challenge soon became validating a major programme in its entirety from scratch in a new academic environment with more stringent validation requirements and, crucially, much lower internal political support for such a programme. Although this time, I enjoyed the support of a very entrepreneurial head of department and dean, I was not aware of the personality clashes that existed with senior management at the university’s academic standards team. This would prove a major obstacle in validation, though I was determined for this not to become fatal for my new programme which, after much debate with colleagues from the university and the Institute of Place Management, we decided to call MA Place Regeneration and Marketing (IPM, 2008b).

Another major decision in this process before the programme could enter the internal validation process was whether to design it as a full-time, part-time or distance learning programme. After considerable debate with colleagues and with the aid of market research I carried out with town centre managers whilst still at the Institute of Place Management (Coca-Stefaniak, 2007), it was decided that a

blended learning approach would be taken to maximise the programme's ability to attract working professionals in regeneration, city marketing and town centre management from across the UK and overseas. Following this model, and with the advantage of my experience of delivering a similar programme in Manchester, I was able to convince senior management and colleagues that face-to-face workshops and lectures should be condensed into intensive 2-3 day blocks held every eight weeks with the remainder of learning guided through a combination of online support and distance learning materials that students should complete before and after each block of workshops. The modules chosen for validation and delivery were as follows:

- Place shaping and making (20 credits)
- Principles of place design (20 credits)
- The built environment (10 credits)
- Cultural and critical studies (10 credits)
- Place marketing (20 credits)
- Elective module (10 credits)
- Research methodology (20 credits)
- Major project or thesis (60 credits)

This content reflected the programme's focus on the multidisciplinary nature of town centre management and place management as opposed to the rather process-focus outlook of the MSc Place Management I had been part of earlier at Manchester Metropolitan University. Hence, the MA Place Regeneration and Marketing was designed from its outset to deal with the full place management spectrum of activities – from place making to the marketing and branding of destinations that, in turn, needed to be managed with full consideration to the cultural and physical characteristics of each location. Although other urban regeneration programmes existed in the UK and overseas at the time, it was this multidisciplinary and cross-spectrum approach that made the MA Place Regeneration and Marketing a first of its kind in Europe (Uni-123, 2009).

In spite of the clear market niche identified as part of the design of this programme and its multidisciplinary nature (or perhaps exactly because of this), its validation process turned into a farcical process, where established pedagogic concepts such as blended learning (Graham and Osquithorpe, 2003; Schweizer *et al*, 2003; Rovai

and Jordan, 2004) were repeatedly questioned by senior management from the Programmes Quality Department in spite of the fact that similar learning programmes were already in existence at the university. Similarly, the multidisciplinary nature of the programme appeared to be interpreted more as a threat rather than a strategic opportunity for joint work with other departments and faculties in line with the multidisciplinary and cross-faculty work ethic that so many university vice-chancellors tend to encourage, though seldom reward enough for academics to risk in an environment where specialisation continues to be seen as preferable to multidisciplinary research in spite of the fact that this transition has already been made by many private sector firms.

In the end, the quality management team's difficulties with understanding the concept of blended learning turned out to be a mere pretext for something much more insidious – I had failed to foresee the political in-fighting that existed already between the head of my department (Dean of the School of Creative Enterprise, at the time) and the Programmes Quality Department, which would eventually precipitate the demise of the programme's main supporters at senior management level following a major strategic restructuring of the whole faculty. In spite of this, I managed to keep my colleagues on my side and eventually got the programme validated after developing not only a whole programme student handbook but also an entire set of teaching and distance learning materials for a whole module – all this without payment or retribution of any kind in terms of teaching allowances in my schedule. As a new regime progressively took hold in my faculty and a new head of college was brought in, the level of support from senior management for the MA Place Regeneration and Marketing diminished further to a point where I had to do my own marketing of the programme with a target of a minimum number of fifteen students in the first cohort to make the programme 'viable', when other MA programmes had cohorts of as few as six students.

Using my networks of contacts among practising town centre managers in the UK and overseas, and with a bit of in-kind help from the Association of Town Centre Management, I managed to recruit nearly three times the number of students that started the MSc Place Management in Manchester two years earlier, exceeding the university's target by five places. Even this could not save the programme. Three months before its start, an official statement from the Head of London College of Communication aborted this programme along with several other postgraduate

courses at the university (Swain, 2009). Almost concurrently to this, my job and those of dozens of other colleagues was deemed 'at risk' only for all of us to lose our jobs twelve months later. One year on from these events, an investigation by the government's Quality Assurance Agency would find that the university's process for closing courses had been "not fit for purpose" and the restructuring of our faculty had a "detrimental impact" on students (Baker, 2011), but this was to be too late for my position and my MA Place Regeneration and Marketing programme.

Understandably, this was one of the lowest points (personally and professionally) of my career, which spans today eight years in industry and nine in academia. As much of a disappointment as it was to have the fruit of so much work swept away in the form of the abortion of my MA programme, I had managed to sow the seeds for the professionalization of town centre management as one of a handful of pioneers in this field from a qualifications standpoint. By this stage, the Introductory Diploma in Place Management was in its fourth edition at Manchester Metropolitan University, my starting cohort of students on the MSc Place Management (Manchester) had graduated, I had been made a Fellow of the Institute of Place Management, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, I was editor-in-chief of the (still embryonic) Journal of Town and City Management, and I had secured 250,000 Euros of European Union funding which, somewhat to my surprise, was declined by the University of the Arts London. As a result of the latter, I took the funding with me to the Association of Town Centre Management to fund my (new) part-time appointment as International Manager (ATCM, 2011) starting in September 2010. This appointment coincided (completely incidentally) with the launch of my Journal of Town and City Management, which I discuss in the next section of this chapter.

Reflective conclusions on key personal learning points

- Town centre managers across Europe have a diversity of qualifications and professional backgrounds that has often been underestimated. This diversity is in line with the (constantly changing) competency requirements of this profession, which makes the design of professional and academic qualifications for town centre managers a particularly complex task.

- Emerging professions such as town centre management, where often the lack of existing recognised professional qualifications is a major gap for employers to address, require the development of qualifications at a number of levels so as to satisfy the needs of an evolving market both in terms of skills gaps as well as employer recognition for continuous professional development.
- A participatory style of learning and teaching, although encouraged by current pedagogic theory, needs to allow for a certain level of uncertainty and even surprise with respect to its outcome. This is particularly applicable to student cohorts where there is a wide variety of professional and academic qualification backgrounds at very different levels of seniority and academic standing.
- In spite of a growing discourse among senior management in academia, which favours multidisciplinary approaches to research and cross-faculty cooperation, early adopters of this mantra should be aware that a majority of higher education institutions remain at the very early stages of this path and continue to favour individual achievements in single-discipline topics. Only institutions with very visionary senior management and a well-established relationship with industry through successful academic enterprise mechanisms are in a position to encourage this type of multidisciplinary collaboration, though this may often be through third leg funding.

3.4 The Journal of Town and City Management (2008-present)

In 2008, there were already a considerable number of journals that catered for the 'market' and knowledge body that town centre management belongs to. These journals included, among many others, the following (journal emphasis shown in brackets):

- Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal (practitioner; mainly UK-based)
- Cities (academic and practitioner; international)
- Distribución y Consumo (practitioner; mainly Spain)

- Place Branding and Public Diplomacy (academic and practitioner; international)
- Urbanista (practitioner; Poland)
- International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (mainly academic; international)
- International Journal of Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing (mainly academic; international)
- International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research (academic; international)
- Urban Design International (academic; international)
- Journal of Urban Design (academic and practitioner; international)

Unfortunately, most of the existing journals then, like today, had a clearly defined area of specialism (e.g. retail, marketing, urban planning, urban regeneration) which they tended not to digress from in spite of growing evidence that most fields of knowledge are actually multidisciplinary in nature (Klein, 1990; Lattuca, 2001; Rhoten and Parker, 2004) in spite of academic tendencies towards the segregation of knowledge into silos (Buchbinder et al, 2005; Lynch, 2006) following methods similar to the biological classification of species.

I made my first attempt to address this problem in the field of place management in 2007 through my appointment as a member of the editorial board of the embryonic Journal of Place Management and Development, which was about to be launched (Retail Enterprise Network, 2007). Evidence of my intentions to treat this as a multidisciplinary journal was clearly set out in my contribution to the journal's first issue special editorial piece co-authored with members of its editorial advisory board, in which I argued the case for sustainability as a key driver for town centre development and management (Coca-Stefaniak, 2008). Although the Journal of Place Management and Development, supported by the Institute of Place Management, had a set of laudable editorial objectives from its outset, which included the blending of academic research and practice-based case studies, the real aim of the journal became rather evident within a year of its launch.

Firstly, the journal's affiliation with the Institute of Place Management, which is itself based at Manchester Metropolitan University, meant that academic publications dominated over practitioner ones. Part of this was as a result of the journal's

reliance on academic conferences as sources of papers for special issues. Similarly, a major opportunity for the integration of practice and academic research was missed through the creation of an editorial board where academics from Anglo-Saxon universities prevailed over practitioners and academics whose mother tongue was not English. Thus, major world regions such as Eastern Europe, Russia, Latin America and Asia were (deliberately?) omitted from influencing the journal's editorial policies purely as a result of the Institute's apparent focus on English-speaking countries, in spite of growing evidence that it is in these parts of the world that knowledge in place management is being developed following increasingly innovative approaches to complex problems linked to globalising trends (Palomino, 2003; Jordan and Simioni, 2003; Asian Development Bank, 2008; Moscow Urban Forum, 2011).

Another limitation that the Journal of Place Management and Development appeared to fall into from an early stage was its pursuit of academic recognition through the academic journal ranking system. This was partly influenced by two factors. On the one hand, the Institute of Place Management is based at an academic institution, which uses research journal rankings as one of its staff research performance criteria. This issue appears to have affected adversely fields with only a modest history of academic research history, such as tourism, where academic institutions are still trying to differentiate mediocre research from potentially ground-breaking studies (McKercher, 2005). Place management as an academic discipline still in its early teenage years of research impact would appear to find itself in a rather similar situation to that of tourism. In spite of the fact the academic journal ranking system remains a highly contentious point in academia (Adler and Harzing, 2009), the pressure from senior management at Manchester Metropolitan University on the Journal of Place Management and Development to work towards this level of recognition meant that much practitioner input had to be 'sieved out' in spite of the fact that in many cases these contributions may have been far more innovative or even visionary than more theoretical academic papers. As my level of disillusionment with this state of affairs grew, little did I know that I would be given the chance to address this issue with a degree of empowerment and responsibility I had not experienced yet professionally at this level.

In July 2008, four months after taking up my appointment as Senior Lecturer at London College of Communication (University of the Arts London), I was

approached by Henry Stewart Publishers with a challenging offer: they wanted me to lead a journal on city management by helping them to build it from scratch, including the design of its editorial board and editorial objectives. Henry Stewart Publishers already had a similar established journal - Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal -, though it was a specialised publication with a much more restricted readership market than the journal they were offering me to lead. Additionally, it became apparent through informal conversations with the publishers that they had approached me following consultation with leading figures in the field of town centre management in the UK and the US, including the Chief Executive of the UK-based Association of Town Centre Management who recommended me as an ideally suited candidate for this role.

Although the annual editorial fee for this journal was very low (£3,000 annually before tax, an editorial fee that has remained unchanged since), I accepted to take this challenge on after convincing my line manager at the university to give me a research allowance of 50 hours (out of 550 annual hrs) on my timetable to start work on the building of an international editorial board and commission papers from practitioners and academics alike.

The initial launch date for the Journal of Town and City Management was set to be March 2009. My task that summer became to develop an editorial board team, set up an anonymous peer review system and source potential papers for publication that would have to be first assessed for quality through this system. From the outset of this journal, I decided I would make it stand out from the competition in three key ways:

1. The Journal of Town and City Management would be international in its outlook. For this to be truly embedded in the journal's editorial objectives and content, I decided that the editorial board should include a minimum of 10 different nationalities spread as evenly as practically possible across five continents.
2. Academic discourse would not dominate over practitioner input. This meant effectively that academic papers would need to include practical recommendations for policy makers and city managers. Similarly, practitioner papers would not be accepted for publication

without a minimum level of references incorporated as part of the main body. All in all, academics would often be challenged in their approach by having their papers reviewed by at least one practitioner member of the journal's editorial board, and practitioner authors would be challenged to substantiate their claims and support their arguments with publicly accessible evidence. In essence, although my aim would not be to create a mere practitioner journal of the type that Henry Stewart Publishers are used to, I would also defy the journal's need to strive for a place in the academic journal ranking hierarchy.

3. The journal would address the management of towns and cities internationally through a combination of the full range of knowledge bodies and disciplines that affect this field. Effectively, this meant that the journal's editorial board team would need urban planners as much as city marketers, architects, public infrastructure engineers, tourism and regeneration specialists, artists, sociologists, consultants, local authority employees, retail specialists, city managers and academics.

Working towards a publication handover deadline of December 2008 was challenging, particularly in view of the difficulties I encountered with the internal validation of the MA Place Regeneration and Marketing outlined in section 3.3. I was also under pressure from the publishers to include papers from US-based authors so as to help the journal target the North American market, which at times curtailed somewhat my editorial freedom.

In this first issue of the journal, I also decided to showcase the breadth of specialisms and international outlook of our editorial board - sixteen nationalities across five continents at this early stage - by inviting each member of the editorial board to contribute with an individual 500-word piece to a special inaugural editorial by the title of "International trends in city management – Views from around the editorial board". For this set of individual pieces, I asked each author to deal with key issues affecting towns and cities in their country of origin, and to highlight the role of our Journal of Town and City Management in addressing these

internationally. After much chasing, nagging and even rewriting entire pieces after proof-reading (for at least a third of the members of the editorial board, English was not their mother tongue), I managed to secure publishable contributions from twenty six members of my editorial board (Feehan et al, 2010). The first set of papers for this issue were also approved for publication after a certain level of negotiation on my part with some of the reviewers. Now I only had one more thing to add to my list of tasks never performed before in my life in addition to the ones outlined above, namely to write the inaugural editorial piece for a journal where I was editor-in-chief. This was a task that I feared originally and ended up absolutely relishing as I could finally break free from academic writing convention and protocol to address concepts such as interdisciplinarity and practitioner-academic interaction in the field of city management without worrying about how grounded my thinking was in fields of knowledge such as system design, urbanism, sociology or marketing. In spite of the challenge that this posed in terms of taking me outside my comfort zone as an academic, I found the experience absolutely liberating.

As the deadline for the handover of all materials for the journal's inaugural issue approached, the 2008 global credit crunch took hold first in the US, then the UK and, almost simultaneously, much of the rest of the western world. By October 2008, I had received news from Henry Stewart Publishers that the launch of the journal would be delayed by six months due to "challenging market conditions". In financial terms, this also meant that my employer would not see the first £250 payment from the publishers until October 2009 – a full twelve months since the decision to grant me a 50-hour research allowance was made. As internal political support for my postgraduate degree course waned, my line manager decided to cut any further research allowances linked to the journal from my teaching time table in spite of my protestations. Further bad news was to come with regards to the launch of the journal. By May 2009, the publishers decided to postpone its launch again. This time it was done without consultation with me as editor and the postponement was for a further 12 months. By now, I began to worry seriously about our ability to launch the journal at all, not to mention that I had to use all my resolve and motivation to keep authors on board and avoid having them take their papers to another journal, not to mention the progressive degradation of the innovation element of their papers as time passed.

In the meantime, Henry Stewart Publishers started putting pressure on me about the need for more US-based articles for future issues of JTCM, the need for more practitioner input and, incredibly, the importance of a minimum level of secured subscriptions to the journal before its launch in spite of the fact that subscribers did not have access to content. Increasingly, it became obvious that the publishers were looking for a way out of their (small) initial investment. In the absence of any marketing of the journal from the publishers, I managed to convince them to create a basic web page for the journal that I could then advertise through my contacts and those of my editorial board team. A basic journal website finally appeared (with content provided almost entirely by its editor-in-chief) nearly a year since the journal's initial editorial team was confirmed (see <http://www.henrystewart.com/jtcm.aspx>). By this stage, I had almost given up as I had no certainty whatsoever with regards to whether the journal would be launched, I no longer enjoyed support for this work from my employing university and I certainly had not seen a penny in payment for what amounted to over four hundred man-hours invested into this project out of my time alone. Yet, it was probably a combination of the latter, my wife's support and personal pride that helped me to persevere. There were also quite a few members of the journal's editorial board of different levels of seniority in their chosen professions that really helped me to keep my spirits up in spite of the thousands of miles that separated us geographically.

As the banking crisis of 2008 subsided leaving in its wake a nearly bankrupt United Kingdom, I was left holding a set of wedding invitations in one hand for what would become the happiest moment of my life and a redundancy letter in my other hand as a result of staff reductions at the university. Surprisingly, and just when I had almost given up on ever seeing the first issue of my journal published, I got news from the publishers that we were going ahead with a launch date of June 2010 – nearly two years since I had been first approached to create and lead this journal. The fact that I would receive £250 for two years of hard work, often after normal office hours, was no longer relevant. I had seen my project through. It was also the beginning of a new journey professionally in a role for which I had never received any training or even advice.

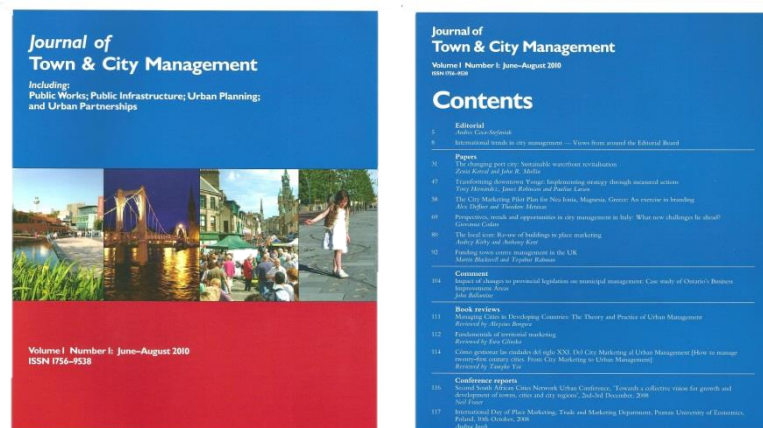


Figure 3. Cover and back pages of inaugural issue of the Journal of Town and City Management.

The reaction from my editorial board to the publication of the first issue (see Figure 3) of our Journal of Town and City Management could not have been more moving. Some of the comments included:

“I have truly enjoyed the birth and first several issues of this most valuable publication; and now another birth [that of my baby daughter in 2012] will enrich your lives for decades to come!”

- David Feehan
President of Civitas Consultants LCC
and former CEO of the International
Downtown Association
Silver Spring, MD
USA

“I am impressed you have stuck with it [the journal]. The need for the journal is only becoming more apparent, 17 months after you proposed it. There is a missing level of governance that is the subject of this journal...and the book I am working on. The need is clear and crucial to economic development and social relations for 21st century urbanism.”

- Christopher B. Leinberger
Professor of Practice in Urban Planning
University of Michigan
USA

“You are doing a great job as editor, against the odds of the current economic climate. I think the content of the journal is what matters and whether it's electronic or print is not material. Keep going and if you need any help from us [the editorial board], let us know.”

- Georgia Smith
Head of VisitWorcester
Worcester
UK

“As someone who has had extensive contact with other journal's editors, I can report to you that your performance is exemplary. Your commitment to the idea of a quality journal that provides an outlet for academics and practitioners the like has been unwavering. The mere fact that you recognize the need for this type of journal is indicative of your visionary leadership. Your ability to manage the many demands of a founding editor has been without compromise. You have secured manuscripts for multiple issues of the first volume without the journal having yet secured its place in the academic literature. This achievement speaks to your overall reputation among those who share our interests in town and city management. By placing their pieces in your hands, they demonstrate, through actions, their belief in you and your ability to see the journal through to publication. I have no doubt the journal is under the best possible leadership. The only factors in this endeavor that are preventing you from achieving the realization of publication are a less than cooperative publisher and economic conditions whose horrendous effects have no limits. Please accept this as my vote for you to remain the Editor-in-Chief and a show of full faith and support.”

- Jeffery L. Osgood
Assistant Professor
Center for Social & Economic Research
West Chester University of
Pennsylvania (USA)

As the journal became established following its second issue and progressed on ambitiously towards its first special issue (issue 3) on city marketing and branding, editorial board members began to endorse my journal publicly with statements available on the journal's website (see <http://www.henrystewart.com/jtcm/testimonials.aspx>):

"Journal of Town and City Management can be instrumental to practitioners in commissioning research and publishing robust evidence from a wide variety of projects, worldwide, to guide them in finding the right solution to different problems. A reliable reference source, which has posed sufficiently searching and objective questions to the success or otherwise of projects (failed projects can be just as informative as the successful ones) will be genuinely valuable as a tool to support and inform decision making and will contribute to the body of evidence already available to town centre managers worldwide."

- Georgia Smith
Head
VisitWorcester
Tourism and City Centre Management
Worcester
UK

"Journal of Town and City Management will play an important role in providing individuals in town and city management knowledge of good practice and case studies of successful town centre management models. It will also provide strategic input and spur debate with regards to the need for incorporating town and city centre management in the early phases of the planning of new areas and the regeneration of older ones. The Journal will also contribute to the progressive rise in confidence among senior decision makers with regards to the need for successful public-private partnership working to deliver better integrated town and city management into the 21st century."

- Hans C Löwlund
Chairman
Svensk Handel
Sweden

"Journal of Town and City Management can be an effective vehicle to share best practices world-wide and an opportunity for academics, consultants and city management professionals to learn from the experience, vision and reflections of colleagues throughout the world."

- Charles Gauthier
Executive Director
Downtown Vancouver Business
Improvement Association
Vancouver
Canada

"I see five key areas where Journal of Town and City Management will be able to make a positive contribution, namely:

- *publishing "cutting edge" articles that will increase efficiencies in a period of hard times;*
- *comparing approaches taken in different nations concerning similar issues (e.g. city centre revitalisation);*
- *developing "special topic" issues that focus on critical issues (i.e. city marketing and promotion, urban sprawl, city zoning);*
- *providing regular update sections in the form of book reviews, conference reports and international policy updates; and*
- *including a suitable mix of articles drawing from applied research, visionary thinking and good practice in city management that stimulate debate among academics, practitioners and policy-makers"*

- Zenia Kotval
Professor of Urban and Regional
Planning
Michigan State University (USA)

Today, two years on from its rather wavering start, the Journal of Town and City Management has entered its third volume confidently (eight issues published already) in spite of renewed concerns about the world economy, particularly in the European Union. My journal has also secured a further two special issues for 2012 – one on online place branding (a first of its kind in academic-practitioner journals) and one on urban revitalisation, which will set the Journal of Town and City Management in direct competition with the more established Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal. As editor-in-chief, I have published five editorial papers but also encouraged academics and practitioners alike to contribute with guest editorials and comment pieces that challenge the status quo of city management in the UK and overseas.

Although the journal has been a poor income earner for me from a financial standpoint, my learning curve has been immense. I have supported academic colleagues, overseas practitioners that I had never met before and even former postgraduate students of mine through the intricate process of peer review. In some cases I have had to turn down papers and even recommend that they are published in other (rival?) more academic journals. In other cases, I have argued with reviewers to defend the innovative nature of some of the manuscripts submitted even though there were clearly quality issues for the authors to address. All in all, as in many of my professional evidence outputs discussed in this chapter, I have to confess that I have surprised myself perhaps as much as I may have surprised others. Although I have not deliberately sought adversity, it has often found me. Yet, my traits of character forged at an early age hiking in the mountains of Poland and Spain first and leading men in Europe's deepest underground mine a decade later have never abandoned me. I feel I have managed to steer the Journal of Town and City Management into calmer waters now. There is much left to be done but, with 60 members on its editorial board as of December 2011 and a mix of professions, specialisms, age, gender and nationalities that would be the envy of many other similar publications, I feel my job is nearly done and, perhaps, my next personal development lesson should be to let the journal go and be led by someone else able to continue building on these foundations with a similar set of values to those shared at present by our editorial board. I have a major personal motivation to exercise this selfless act – the birth of my baby daughter in January of 2012.

Regardless of people's preferences and views with regards of whether professional development should take precedence over personal and family issues, one thing I do know: whilst others talk or write eloquently about interdisciplinary work, I have achieved it through this journal. In many ways, the Journal of Town and City Management has become me and I have become it – always ready to step outside the accepted comfort zone, listening to the arguments of others with the curiosity of a child, challenging 'established' knowledge with the zeal of a pioneer, and, fundamentally, encouraging other people from differing disciplines and professional backgrounds to do the same. I do not know what may be the ultimate outcome of the process I have started through this journal, but I do know that the words of Francis Thompson (1859-1907) are particularly appropriate to describe my expectant mind set in this regard:

“All things by immortal power,
Near and Far
Hiddenly
To each other linked are,
That thou canst not stir a flower
Without troubling of a star.”

Reflective conclusions on key personal learning points

- There is still a need for more practitioner-academic journals that emphasise the multidisciplinary nature of town and city management beyond the function of town centre management. Although the Journal of Town and City Management of which I am founder and editor goes some way in addressing this need with an international approach rarely seen in other journals, academic conventions for the grading of journals according to impact have been generally unhelpful in dealing with this as they have tended to skew journals' content towards more academic input with limited contributions from practitioners.
- The development and management of the Journal of Town and City Management has proved key in my ability to demonstrate the global and

multidisciplinary nature of town centre management using an evidence-based approach, even when this process has required a constant compromise with editorial board members (academic and practitioner) from eighteen different nationalities.

- Methodologically, my ethnographic approach to the study of the town centre management profession has moved through this journal from an observer with limited participation to a full participant and even key informant as a clear and visible leader of a community of practice.

4. REFLECTIONS

What is distance? I know that nothing which truly concerns man is calculable, weighable, measurable. True distance is not the concern of the eye: it is granted only to the spirit.

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery in "Flight to Arras"

This chapter summarises my original contribution to knowledge and understanding and impact on practice in town centre management in the UK and internationally. It also reflects on the work I have discussed in chapter three. At the beginning of this contextual statement I identified four contributions I have made through my work. The first two of these related to knowledge and understanding of town centre management research and practice across the European Union. The last two (development and delivery of qualifications and editorial role on Journal of Town and City Management) demonstrated my leading role in this community of practice, which includes practitioners and academics alike. The process of synthesis and reflection I have engaged in as part of this DProf programme has allowed me to realise that my contribution is broader and has had a greater impact than I had initially realised. In summary, my contribution could be outlined as follows:

1. Design, planning, delivery and analysis of what remains the largest integrated comparative study in Europe of small independent retailers in Spain and Great Britain linked directly to existing town centre management schemes.
2. Research, development, publication and transnational dissemination of the first ever international typology of town centre management schemes.
3. Development, validation and delivery of the UK's first ever set of accredited professional and academic qualifications for town centre managers and place managers as part of a larger drive for the professionalisation of place management as part of the Institute of Place Management, where my work was rewarded in the form of a Fellowship granted in 2008.

4. Leadership of the town centre management community of practice as the founding editor-in-chief of the Journal of Town and City Management.
5. Internationalisation and expansion of town centre management practice and thinking by forging international links with related disciplines (e.g. city marketing, urban regeneration, place making, even management) and wider fields (e.g. urban infrastructure, urban planning) through the selection, management and nurturing of an international and multidisciplinary editorial board for the Journal of Town and City Management and the forging of collaborative agreements with higher education institutions and practitioner organisations.

My contribution to town centre management has been multifaceted and at different levels. On the one hand, my international approach to research, teaching and practice in this field has filled an important void in knowledge in the UK and other European countries, where practice and knowledge were seldom developed in a comparative fashion. In fact, one of the phrases I have heard most often from town centre management practitioners across the European Union is “that model [of town centre management] from [insert country of origin here] would not work here because ...”. Yet, once I began to expose the commonality of strategic issues affecting town centres across Europe, both academics and practitioners often conceded that there were certainly elements of practice and strategic thinking from other countries that could be implemented in their locations with various degrees of adaptation. Similarly, although there existed an emerging body of literature (mainly British) linking retail to town centre management schemes, I was one of the first authors to highlight the importance of small and medium-size retailers in these schemes, using initially case studies from Spain and then developing new ones for the UK and other European countries. This process involved a tremendous learning curve for me to achieve a successful transition from an operations manager in the natural resources sector to a project manager and academic in retail and town centre management. Although I had a good background in international project management, my knowledge base was mainly in engineering and operations for the extractive industries with no knowledge of marketing theory and little, if any, knowledge of social research methods. Yet, within four years in academia, I was already getting published in retail journals, presenting at academic conferences (e.g. Contemporary Issues in Retail and Marketing), designing and leading field

research surveys, lecturing practitioners in town centre management and leading course design and validation processes. The work ethic I had to adhere to in order to achieve all this was, upon reflection, something I would struggle to manage today, and even less so with a new born baby in the family.

My emphasis on co-authoring with practising town centre managers from the very outset involved a personal transition in research philosophy from an initial positivist mind set - shared by many of my academic colleagues - to a more phenomenological and pragmatic research philosophy linked to ethnography that often put me at odds with other academics in terms of my research findings. Moreover, my approach of co-authoring with practitioners also ran largely against accepted practice among academics, whereby single author publications or, at most, co-authored papers with other academic colleagues used to be considered as 'desirable' and altogether of a higher quality, even though there does not appear to be any research evidence to suggest that this would be necessarily the case in terms of impact. In spite of these difficulties, it was this process of co-authoring that probably allowed me to learn most about the town centre management profession, its diversity and richness in depth. Internationally, I was in my element at an interpersonal level as I was raised in three distinctively different cultures – Latin, Slavonic and Anglo-Saxon. Yet, the fascinating variety of European approaches to the management of town centres also meant I was constantly learning technically as well as culturally, whilst keeping up with global trends. Equally, my European projects demanded a very fast transition to different styles of communication, dissemination and negotiation with transnational partners with often differing agendas, business values and priorities. For me, this was a very welcome window to the world from the relative homogeneity of academia.

My approach to the study of town centre management was also one of broadening the field, rather than pursuing the increasing level of specialisation that is often rewarded in academia. From the outset, it became apparent to me that researching and teaching town centre management purely from a management perspective was a gross oversimplification of this profession, which requires significant levels of technical knowledge in related disciplines including town planning, marketing, regeneration and retail, to mention but a few. The founding of the Journal of Town and City Management allowed me to do exactly that – I was finally able to lead a community of practice using an international and multidisciplinary approach.

Equally, as editor in chief, I could approach research institutes, higher education institutions and private sector companies with a rather neutral job title that would help me, as a modest ethnographer, to enter other communities of practice (e.g. regeneration) without arousing suspicion, envy or even indifference. After all, I actually had something to offer these communities of practice in terms of potential international dissemination, subject to my journal's peer review process, of course. Today, I continue to lead this community of practice internationally and have been invited to sit on the scientific committee for the selection of papers at a number of conferences, including the 2nd International Place Branding Conference held in Bogota on 20-22nd January 2011 (<http://placebranding.ning.com/events/2nd-international-place>), the 1st Place Branding Online Conference held at Barcelona's University of Pompeu Fabra on 6-7th October 2011 (<http://www.cas.upf.edu/news/29>) and the forthcoming Jornadas Internacionales sobre Urbanismo y Gestion Comercial due to be held at the University of Valladolid on town centre management conference chaired by Juan Carlos Remiro Frechoso due to start on 31st May 2012 (<http://www.uva.es/jiugc>). Similarly, my opinion about city management in a global context has also been sought in the form of media interviews in Romania (<http://www.voxmontis.tv/?p=1487>) and Northern Ireland's BBC Radio Foyle (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/b01f83bf>) and as an advisor to a number of organisations including the International Downtown Association (www.ida-downtown.org) and Global Urban Development (www.globalurban.org).

Upon reflection, in many ways my journey in the field of town centre management has been one marked by constant questioning and compromises at personal and professional levels. As a qualified offshore drilling and mining engineer, I had a practice-based problem-solving professional background which was always at odds with my questioning of the validity and applicability of the safety and operations rules that constrained my decision-making. This enquiring stance, which I developed largely through a major personal and professional period of transition as a doctoral research student at the University of Minnesota in the US, would never abandon me and would often set me at odds with individuals in senior positions in industry as well as academia who often appeared to lack the level of creative thinking necessary to innovate and/or operate comfortably in an international multidisciplinary environment. Some of this may have been influenced by the fact that this corresponded with a booming period for the economy in most European countries, including the UK. Equally, in spite of my research and teaching record in

academia, I always remained a project manager/director on short-term contracts in charge of various EU-funded transnational partnerships that, in turn, subsidised my academic positions.

Inevitably, this resulted in significant levels of compromise between my innovation-oriented philosophical stance and the necessity to deliver on complex transnational projects where pre-determined budgets and strict funding body rules often allowed for little deviation. Equally, at a more personal level, I struggled to get accepted by traditional academics on long-term contracts who often deemed practice-based research as inferior to more conceptual work, whilst practitioners often saw me more as an academic, in spite of my industry and private sector management background with a number of FTSE-100 listed companies. In many instances, this situation required all my inner strength and determination not to return professionally to my 'comfort zone' of operations management in the natural resources sector. This often had an adverse impact on my ability to participate in discussions with other academic colleagues with regards to the epistemology of town centre management as well as how it should be approached in terms of research and teaching, though I am still uncertain as to whether this was a fact or purely my own perception born from a feeling of fixed-term contract job insecurity.

Overall, my journey over the last nine years from industry into academia and back into the private sector has been a rollercoaster of emotions and a steep climb in terms of personal growth and professional development. In addition to a successful professional conversion from natural resources management to retail and town centre management, I have also managed to attain three qualifications (all with distinction) on a distance-learning basis – a Postgraduate Diploma in Management, an MSc in Management and a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. At the heart of this has been one of my key traits of character – determination. This same determination helped me to become a leader in the town centre management community of practice through research, curriculum design, teaching and the founding of the Journal of Town and City Management. The fact that the latter was completed successfully during one of the worst recessions known in the UK and much of the western world since World War II is testimony to my dogged determination, particularly in times of adversity – something I learnt as a long-distance mountain hiker since my childhood. Curiously also, the same mix of determination and compromise I have exercised on a regular basis in my

professional life can be linked directly to the lessons I learnt in the mountains of northern Spain and Poland from an early age. Indeed, I had to turn back from many a mountain without reaching its summit only to often try again - sometimes with success and sometimes without it - several months or years later.

As I enter what is probably going to be the most challenging and fulfilling phase of my life, parenthood, I do so in the full knowledge that my journey will continue ... or perhaps it is about to start altogether at a more profound level. Much of what I have achieved professionally to date has been fulfilling, challenging and often fun but I continue to struggle with the level of legacy I have actually contributed to this world. The birth of my baby daughter on 25 January 2012 - half-way through the writing of this DProf submission - may well help me to fathom this out. Perhaps my legacy is yet to come ... but will it be in the form of a higher level of professional achievement or will it be by inspiring my daughter to be brave in pursuing her dreams in life without the fear of unemployment, lack of acceptance by others and the need for constant compromise?

5. NEW DIRECTIONS

Those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.

- Bernard Baruch

Town centre management is at a crossroads in the UK and much of continental Europe. In Spain, up to 70 per cent of the funding of town centre management schemes has traditionally come in most cases from public funds. At a time when doubts continue to grow over the country's ability to manage its public debt and drastic cuts are implemented across the board in government departments, autonomous regions and local authorities, this is bound to change the funding - if not the landscape altogether – of town centre management in Spain.

The situation is not much better in the UK. A recent government study commissioned to the retail celebrity Mary Portas in 2011 brought to the forefront the declining state of a substantial proportion of high streets in towns and cities across the UK as a result of rapidly changing consumer behaviour trends. Although the Mary Portas Report recommended the creation of "town teams" to deal with this, it failed to explain or even address the concept of town centre management and it would appear that it will do little, if anything at all, to argue the case for town centre management to be granted statutory status, which would have saved the jobs of hundreds of town centre managers as budget cuts begin to take their toll in local authorities across the country.

I remain hopeful that my role as International Manager at the Association of Town Centre Management will allow for a wider debate to commence on the future of our country's towns and cities through input from my EU-funded projects. In spite of the initial reticence from senior management at this organisation in the 1990s to deal with wider social issues beyond retail-led urban revitalisation, I will strive to push for a wider debate on these issues, which range from aspects of social exclusion of the elderly and the young, the increasing commodification of our town centres, the long-term effects of youth unemployment (e.g. 2011 London riots) and other key

sustainability aspects, some of which I will be outlining in a forthcoming editorial article in my Journal of Town and City Management.

Also, I intend to address the impact of social media on the interaction of town centres with their key stakeholders and opportunities for place branding online through forthcoming special issues of my journal. I will be also writing with current project partners a White Paper aimed at the European Commission and the European Parliament to influence major funding programmes and policy-making related to town centres across the European Union. In addition to this, I would like to start applying the concepts of town centre management and place management to smaller towns in Europe as well as emerging economies (e.g. India, Brazil, Russia, China). Although I will continue to argue for this to be done through ATCM's international networks, I would not like to discard the idea of setting up a consultancy to pursue this initiative more effectively. The same applies to my interest in carrying out research into the elements that often result in conflict between the way our towns and cities are designed and how they are then managed.

Yet, all this pales into insignificance by comparison with the fundamental change that I have experienced as an individual in my view of what constitutes learning and valid knowledge. This change has been brought about by a single experience – my work towards this DProf qualification with the Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University. In a world prone to statistical analyses - more or less biased depending on the funding body -, Twitter-driven news sound bites and dumbed down assessments of socio-economic trends, the transformative influence of this learning programme has been anchored in a skill that appears to be deserting us fast in the 21st century – critical reflection. We spend so much time searching, downloading, browsing and communicating information (or should this be termed instead merely “data”?) that we seem to have forgotten about the process of processing this in a meaningful way that contributes to existing knowledge or at the very least helps to question it. The Institute of Work Based Learning's brave pedagogic and research approach based on critical reflection has been a revolutionary and altogether liberating experience for me. For the first time in my professional life, I have been encouraged to read less and think (critically) more, which is tremendously refreshing given the conservative and somewhat reverential ethos of other doctoral programmes I have first-hand experience of, particularly the

US-based PhD system. In many ways, the DProf programme has helped me to rediscover a part of me led by critical thought that had remained dormant for years as a result of the low status it appears to enjoy in English-speaking countries. It has also given me the confidence to attempt implementing this pedagogically in workshops with practising town centre managers and with students at the university ... for anyone can read and cite other authors, but few will actually have the courage or ability to critique current knowledge and offer an alternative view based on the life-long process of self-reflection and enquiry that appears to be all but extinct in so many people. The exercise of this liberating state of mind, as I have discovered, is one of a few things in life that I am not prepared to compromise on.

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